South Haven Tribune

$3

December 14, 2025

Julie Newell / Tribune Editor

Amy Cockburn brings her knowledge and experience from the military and multiple college degrees into her position as the new South Haven High School principal.

Forging opportunities

SHHS principal shares her passion for learning

By JULIE NEWELL
SH Tribune Editor

SOUTH HAVEN — From college basketball and military service to classroom teaching and district leadership, South Haven High School principal Amy Cockburn has taken an unconventional path to education.

Cockburn, originally from Indiana, is a lifelong learner with degrees spanning education, history and nonprofit management as well as a doctorate she is currently pursuing. Her varied careers and personal experiences have shaped her approach to leadership and student success.

Cockburn recently sat down with South Haven Tribune Editor Julie Newell to discuss her life and goals as the new high school principal.

Where did you go to college?

I went to several different colleges. I'll start with my most recent – I'm currently at Indiana State University, working on my Ph.D. in educational leadership; working on my dissertation. I have a master's degree from Purdue University (in) educational leadership. Grace (College) is nonprofit management. I have an undergraduate degree from Purdue in social studies. I have an undergraduate degree from New York in liberal arts with an emphasis on military history. I've gone to other universities, just didn't get the degree. I played college basketball at the University of St. Francis, and then Weber State (University) and then I played rugby at Weber State and Indiana University.

It took me a long time to get my initial degree, but now I'm always in school, learning. I think the part that education is great, because I get to learn and I will keep learning my whole life. I'm also working on a master's degree in environmental policy as kind of like my fun learning.

Did you always want to go into education?

No, my parents are both teachers, educators and so I do believe that it is genetic. But you grow up in that environment, and so that's what you know and that's what you become comfortable with. I have two sisters and we would always play school and things and I went to college and majored in English, anthropology and history.

Then I was talked into education and I thought, "OK, I like this, but then switched out to anthropology again and history." Then I joined the military and when I was in the military, my primary duty was training. I've always been interested in it, but then coming back to it, I guess that's just what I'm supposed to do. But my interests have been very varied. I worked in a factory, I worked outside construction, different things, but I always came back to education.

Why did you decide to go into those areas of study?

What it comes down to, when I look at why I went into those areas, it was the teacher. I connected with my high school social studies teacher. I connected with a college professor. I helped write a book on Russian orphan diplomacy. But it wasn't necessarily about the content, it was the professor, it was the teacher; they were always the inspiration on here's something else that you can learn.

It wasn't that I found this stuff on my own – it was always the teacher. I think that's also what drives a lot of us in education when you say, why are you a teacher? I had this great teacher, I had this great professor. I got lucky because I had a lot of great professors, a lot of great teachers who put me on all these different paths and so not necessarily the content, but 100 percent it was the educators behind it.

What did you do after college?

So, I started in K (kindergarten) through three, Title One, so a lot of literacy. I did (grades) four, five, six, social studies; seven, eight, science and social studies, government, econ, PE, life, science, U.S. history, world history (and a) business class. I've also been athletic director, assistant principal, interim superintendent – like acting superintendent – curriculum director and again, principal at a few schools.

What drew you to South Haven?

The school I was at this year, I had been principal there, and I had cancer last year. So, I was just exhausted, and I thought, "I don't think I'm doing as good as I could here and I've always wanted to move to Michigan." I talked to my superintendent and I said, "Hey, here's my thoughts," and he's like, "I'll support you whatever you want to do, like if you want to leave, it's going to be terrible for us." So, I looked at a few positions up here and I looked at the demographics, because my idea of South Haven is not what our demographics represent.

When I first saw the position, I was like, "Nope, that's not for me," but then I look at our demographics, and I see the diversity and I've never been in such a diverse area. Then I got to come up for the interview, and I had several job offers at the time, and what got me here is I sat through a student panel, a parent community panel, two teacher panels. It was the most rigorous interview process I had, even for superintendent jobs. But when I met with the students and saw how diverse they were, how confident they were, how they all said they were accepted here, I was like, yep. I didn't even know what the salary was. I said, "If I get that offer, I'm taking it." I love the area of Michigan. I think it was our student population and the staff, when I was able to interview with them, you could just tell they were going to be a good staff.

Then probably the biggest thing is Ana, the superintendent. I have never met a leader like her who is so dedicated to kids which align with my values as well. I want to learn from her. I want to be able to work with her to grow students and that background of the decisions that are made, I am 100 percent confident they're in the best interest of kids. That doesn't happen everywhere, and even in the other interviews, I didn't feel that way. She absolutely sealed the deal. I think I'm really lucky to be able to work with her and learn from her and our kids are going to be taken care of. To me, all the right things were in the right place. I feel really fortunate to be here.

What goals or aspirations do you have as principal?

My No. 1 is to take care

See COCKBURN, page A2

SH Twp. OKs rezoning for apartments

By JULIE NEWELL
SH Tribune Editor

SOUTH HAVEN — The South Haven Township board approved the rezoning of the Lighthouse Bridge Pilot project.

The project is for a 52-unit apartment complex, scheduled to be built on 73rd Street.

It will include three buildings; two of the buildings will have 16 units and one will have 20 units.

Board Member Phillip Poole said during Wednesday's meeting that the rent is expected to be in the 80 percent range of the area median income.

This will put rent at $1,190 for a two-bedroom apartment and $1,325 for a three-bedroom apartment.

Poole said there were discussions on how many parking spots will be available. He said the township required 118 spaces, but the board accepted a lower number after the developers did a traffic study which suggested that 89 spaces would be appropriate.

The project is funded by the Michigan State Housing Development Authority.

Poole said construction for the apartments is scheduled to begin in spring 2026.

Budget

The board approved amendments to the budget during the meeting.

Township Clerk Brenda Bertorelli said there was an increase in income and the biggest change made was the interest income and the property tax admin fee.

The total income increase is now $119,910.

In the expenses she said there were some increases and decreases in several areas. The total expense increase is now $65,185.

Other items

The board approved the meeting schedule for 2026.

Jill Sanborn was appointed deputy treasurer during the meeting.

The board reappointed Grant Nicol to the planning commission and reappointed Lowell Tippman as the zoning board of appeals liaison to the planning commission for 2026-28.

Contact: jnewell@southhaventribune.com, 269-637-1104

SH school board OKs bus driver contract

By JULIE NEWELL
SH Tribune Editor

SOUTH HAVEN — The South Haven school board approved a bus driver contract for 2025-28.

The contract was up for renewal and Superintendent Ana Aleman-Putman said during Wednesday's meeting that it took time and a lot of discussion, but eventually all parties involved were satisfied with the proposed contract. Details of the contract were not available.

The contract will be retroactive to July 2025.

Other Items

The board approved the second reading of the Neola policy updates. The updates included some language changes and updating staffing.

The board approved the purchase of wireless document cameras for North Shore Elementary School.

The board scheduled the organizational meeting to take place at 6:30 p.m. on Jan. 7 with the regular board meeting to follow at the high school.

The organizational meeting happens annually to set up the committee and officer positions for the year.

The board approved the SEIU Food service contract.

Avery Ellis from North Shore Elementary School was chosen for this month's student pride awards. The staff pride award was given to Olivia Atlee-Loudon, who is a counselor at Baseline Middle School.

Pride awards are presented once a month during the school board meetings to at least one South Haven student and staff member. Pride awards are a tradition the school has done for more than 12 years to honor those who have shown excellence in academics and character.

Contact: jnewell@southhaventribune.com, 269-637-1104

The Tribune: Celebrating Our 126th Year

6 94653 00027 4

Rare drug made from scientists' blood saves babies from botulism

By JONEL ALECCIA
Associated Press

Terry Chea / AP photos

Nancy Shine at her home in Los Altos, Calif., on Nov. 21. Shine is a scientist who donated blood plasma that is used to create the treatment for infant botulism.

When Alessandro Barbera was rushed to a California hospital with infant botulism in October, his father had barely heard of the disease, never mind the rare and costly treatment that likely saved the newborn's life.

Now, however, Tony Barbera is deeply grateful for BabyBIG, the sole antidote to the paralyzing and potentially deadly illnesses linked to contaminated ByHeart infant formula.

"It is hugely remarkable," said Barbera, 35, whose son is slowly recovering.

The botulism outbreak tied to ByHeart formula has sickened at least 39 babies across in 18 states since August – and showed the value of the treatment made from blood plasma donated by a small group of scientists and other volunteers.

"This is almost like a miracle," said Dr. Vijay Vishwanath, a pediatric neurologist at Children's Hospital Los Angeles, who has treated several children with botulism during his career – including one in the current outbreak.

"Prior to the discovery of BabyBIG, some of these hospitalizations would take two or three months," Vishwanath said, if infected children recovered at all.

Licensed in 2003, BabyBIG is the brand name for human botulism immune globulin, an IV medication that uses antibodies from volunteers vaccinated against botulism to help babies too young to fight the disease on their own.

Treatment relies on donors

The treatment was the brainchild of the late Dr. Stephen Arnon, who was a scientist with the California Department of Public Health. In 1976, Arnon and colleagues identified the rare form of botulism that affects infants younger than 1 – and then spent his 45-year career figuring out how to treat it. The disease occurs when babies ingest botulism spores that germinate in the intestine and produce a dangerous toxin that attacks the nervous system.

More than 3,700 children worldwide have been treated with BabyBIG since Arnon and his team conducted a pivotal clinical trial in California in 1997 that showed the medication could shorten hospital stays and reduce the need for breathing machines.

Produced in small batches every five years, BabyBIG costs nearly $70,000 per treatment, according to the California Infant Botulism Treatment and Prevention Program, which Arnon founded. Under state law, fees from the sale of the drug are used only to fund the botulism program.

A glass case displaying a vial of BabyBIG, the treatment for infant botulism is shown on Nov. 21, in Aos Altos, Calif.

The medication relies on donors like Nancy Shine, a 76-year-old retired biochemist in California who was vaccinated against botulism because she worked with the lethal germ in a lab. Arnon first recruited Shine and other scientists for the BabyBIG project two decades ago because their blood produced high levels of antibodies, the blood proteins that neutralize the botulism toxin.

The early protocol required the volunteers to receive boosters doses of an investigational botulism vaccine also used by the U.S. military and then undergo a procedure that harvests the blood plasma that contains antibodies against botulism types A and B.

"It was not very pleasant to be vaccinated with," Shine recalled. "There were a lot of side effects, like big welts where you got vaccinated and a little bit of pain."

Still, Shine contributed to three batches of the antitoxin produced between 2008 and 2019.

"It's probably the highlight of my career that I actually was able to participate in this project and donate plasma," Shine said. "We made a product that could save infants' lives."

Development faced hurdles

Because infant botulism is rare, with fewer than 200 cases reported in the U.S. each year, finding funding and other resources to develop the BabyBIG treatment took nearly 15 years and $10.6 million – and faced substantial hurdles, Arnon noted in a 2007 article.

Today, about 30 people on average provide plasma for each batch of BabyBIG, California health officials said. Batch 8, the latest edition, is being manufactured now at a Takeda Pharmaceutical Co. plant near Los Angeles, according to Giles Platford, president of the company's plasma-derived therapies unit. The company contracts with California officials to produce BabyBIG on a "not-for-profit basis," Platford said.

Some of the earliest donors, like Shine, have aged out of the BabyBIG program, which collects blood from adult volunteers up to age 70. New donors are accepted, but they must enroll in a clinical study directed by the California health department and agree to receive a booster dose of a different investigational botulism vaccine.

California officials estimate they have enough BabyBIG in reserve to last until next summer, based on current projections. The ByHeart outbreak is part of a worrisome rise of at least 107 infant botulism cases treated in the U.S. since August, said Dr. Jessica Khouri, senior medical officer for the state program.

Shine recently received a booklet filled with photos and letters from families whose children have recovered from botulism after receiving BabyBIG.

"It's really wonderful. I read a couple each day," she said. "Every single one of them makes you want to cry."

COCKBURN

From page A1

of the staff so they can take care of who matters the most, which is our kids. In that, being in the military, being kind of the type of person I am, safety is a big thing. There's going to be some changes. Not that we're taking autonomy away from students or we're trying to, you know, just change things up, to change it up, but there are some safety things we need to change. At the end of the day, I can say I did everything I could to protect the kids and staff.

When I look at kind of the overall goals, it's not just about, I have to do what's best for kids. I do what's best for staff so they can support the kids how they're needed. But I have to put systems in place to get there and the biggest one right now is the safety. If kids feel they're safe, they're going to learn. So, it's all connected, but kind of like step wise, it's the basic Maslow – you're taking care of those basic human needs, so you can get to the bloom, so the learning side of it and that's just kind of where I'm going.

I like having that end goal of we have to give as many opportunities as to kids as we can, because I'm nontraditional. I didn't finish four year colleges right out of high school. I never thought I'd work in a factory, I never thought I'd be a principal, but my high school gave me the diploma to give me those opportunities. That's what we have to do. Doesn't matter what you do after, but our job is to give you as many doors as possible.

What is your favorite part about working in education?

I love our students. Teaching education is hard. If I can make it a little bit better for staff, if I can make it better for students, that is a good day.

At the end of the day, it's hard being a teacher. Being an educator is difficult. The other night ... it was a challenging day. I love challenges, though, and I think, "OK, I'm just going to go home and I'm going to decompress," but I have a rule where I make at least one positive phone call. Sometimes you have to think about it a little more, but being able to leave having a conversation with a parent saying, "I noticed your son walking through the hallway helping a freshman, that was awesome." I leave better than if I were to leave just without doing that.

I look forward every day to coming to work, and I think the why is we can make positive impacts, not only in staff, but student and community. Everything we're doing, it can absolutely be positive. Schools are the heart of communities. We have such an important job, and I take it extremely serious. When I see a student who is successful in their own way, every student describes success in different ways, that gives me chills. This is why I do it.

Do you have any hobbies, talents or favorite activities that you enjoy?

I'm going to say I have a lot of hobbies. I really enjoy adventure racing. So, adventure racing is it's a multi-discipline race where you're basically given maps and they hide these orange and white flags in the woods that you have to go find and clip it to show that you were there. But, I'm not fast. If I run a 5K, I'm not winning. Adventure racing is a lot of mental and so you have to strategize, okay, so I'm not fast on running, but I'm fast biking. I'm going to try to get more of the points on biking. I'm really good at navigating – I have an advantage, even though I can't sprint the whole time. It just it's one of those events that provides equitable situations for people to succeed.

I know that's odd, but the other piece of that is every year I typically put on a mini-adventure race for the students, and being able to see the students do it, we always throw (in) a learning piece of it too, but it's kind of like the "Amazing Race"/treasure hunt/triathlon. When the kids do it and they get excited about it, then they come back the next year saying, "Hey, can we put it on for the next grade?"

Adventure racing is probably one of my biggest things. I do, like this area of Michigan for surfing. I still need to get better at it again. Really, anything outdoors. I love reading, so I'll read a book a night.

Contact: jnewell@southhaventribune.com, 269-637-1104

Al-Van Humane Society
Adopt ♥ Volunteer ♥ Donate ♥ Advocate
73303 8th Ave. PO Box 421 South Haven, MI 49090
phone 269.637.5062 fax 269.639.2242
Mon, Tue, Thurs, Fri 11 am to 5:30 pm; Sat 11 am to 3 pm; Wed, Sun Closed

Meet our Pet of the Week, Sable!

Sable is a gorgeous, sweet-as-sugar girl with enough energy to power a small city. At 3 years old and 35 pounds, she's the perfect size for snuggles on the couch... when she's not busy zipping around the yard, that is.

Sable would love to be your one-and-only pup so she can enjoy the spotlight (and treats) all to herself. She's already mastered a few commands. "Sit" is her favorite, especially if there's food involved. She's eager to learn more with a patient, loving human by her side.

If you're searching for a loyal best friend who will make you laugh, keep you on your toes, and melt your heart daily, Sable is ready to steal the show and your couch space. Submit an adoption survey at al-van.org/adopt today!

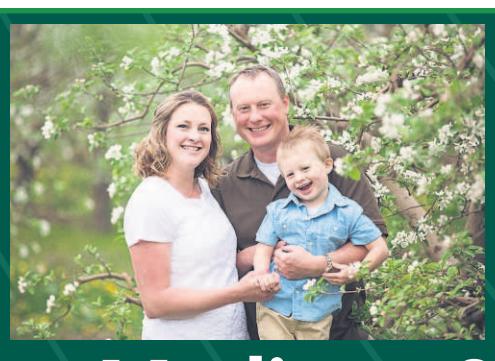
Empty the Shelters
We are so excited to once again be participating in Empty The Shelters thanks to BISSELL Pet Foundation and Cathy Bissell. Adoption fees will be reduced for all our adult cats ($25) and dogs ($60). If you've been thinking about adopting, there's never been a better time to add some extra cheer to your home this holiday season.

Kong-Stuffing Party!
Give a shelter pet a little extra holiday joy at our Holiday Kong Stuffing Party, December 18th from 4-6pm. This hands-on event lets you help fill Kong toys with delicious, pet-safe goodies that will keep our dogs happy, enriched, and comforted during the busy holiday season.

We'll provide all the stuffing supplies. We ask that each attendee bring a Large or XL Kong to fill and donate. Can't make it on December 18? You can still take part in the fun. Donate a Large/XL Kong anytime this month, and our team will gladly stuff it for you to give shelter dogs their own special Christmas treat.

THIS WEEK'S WISH LIST
Medium and large latex gloves and dish soap.

PriorityHealth



Confused about Medicare?
Get an expert opinion.

Plans start at $0 per month.
Contact me today to learn more!

Dale K. Morgan
Red Arrow Insurance Agency
269.637.6619 (TTY users call 711)
dalemorgan@i2k.com
15 72nd St, South Haven
By appointment only

Priority Health has HMO-POS and PPO plans with a Medicare contract. Enrollment in Priority Health Medicare depends on contract renewal. Priority Health complies with applicable Federal civil rights laws and does not discriminate on the basis of race, color, national origin, age, disability, or sex. ATENCIÓN: si habla español, tiene a su disposición servicios gratuitos de asistencia lingüística. Llame al 1.888.389.6648 (TTY: 711)
ملحوظة: إذا كنت تتحدث اذكر اللغة، فإن خدمات المساعدة اللغوية تتوافر لك بالمجان. اتصل برقم 1.888.389.6648 (رقم هاتف الصم والبكم: 711).
Y0056_400040021900_M CMS-accepted 09242018 ©2019 Priority Health 11003M8 11/19

Performance Series to host free holiday concert

By TRIBUNE STAFF

Photo provided

Vox GR performs a wide repertoire of choral music stretching across all eras from composers of diverse backgrounds.

SOUTH HAVEN — The South Haven Performance Series will continue its annual holiday music tradition with the premier of Vox GR.

According to a news release, the premier West Michigan professional choral ensemble will perform at 4 p.m. on Dec. 21 for free at Peace Lutheran Church in South Haven.

"Since its founding in 2010 the Performance Series has concluded its season by celebrating the holidays with a concert free of charge to the public," the release stated. "Donations toward the 2026 series are accepted."

Vox GR, led by Artistic Director Dr. Christopher Mason, was formed in 2022 and all the ensemble's members are professional singers who reside in Michigan.Vox GR performs a wide repertoire of choral music stretching across all eras from composers of diverse backgrounds.

The concert program theme is "Northern Lights: Journey to the North" and will be centered around tunes that celebrate nature, the winter season and Christmas.

"Ranging from traditional carols and African American Spiritual, to pieces sung in Latin, German and Tagalong, the concert culminates in a celebration of the northern lights as recalled in Latvian folk song and the journals of arctic explorers," the release stated.

Vox GR has the mission of enriching West Michigan through performances, community music making, and educational engagement for diverse populations.

"They seek to transform their audience with high-caliber choral music that moves the heart, engages the intellect, and honors our diversity," the release stated.

Vox GR was named the 2024 American Prize second place winner in the Professional Choir Division. The American Prize program rewards the best recorded performances by individual artists and ensembles in the United States at the professional, community/amateur, college, university, church and school levels.

Mason is the director of choral activities at the University of Minnesota Duluth where he directs the flagship University Singers and teaches secondary choral methods, conducting and ear training.

"We're delighted to share wonder, mystery, and joy as expressed in the intimate expressions of the human voice," Mason said in the release. "We believe in the power of music, presented in this intimate way, to affect listeners deeply. In a world where busyness is pervasive, we hope this experience moves your hearts, engages your minds and reunites you with your own inner stillness and eternal beauty."

The South Haven Performance Series is an all-volunteer community-based organization committed to providing a rich mixture of musical arts for area residents and visitors. Most concerts are held during the summer months with the additional holiday concert.

"Performances are provided thanks to the support of the South Haven Community Foundation, corporate sponsors and individual donors," the release stated.

Vox GR is supported by The Michigan Arts and Culture Council and the National Endowment for the Arts.

LMC to form new Student Success Center

College awarded $650K grant to launch initiative

By TRIBUNE STAFF

BENTON TOWNSHIP — Lake Michigan College has been awarded a $650,000 grant to establish a Student Success Center in an effort to transform how the college supports students from enrollment through graduation.

According to a news release, the MiLeap College Success Grant was awarded through the Michigan Department of Lifelong Education, Advancement and Potential (MiLEAP).

"This grant allows us to fundamentally reimagine how we connect students to the resources they need to succeed," LMC President Trevor Kubatzke said in the release. "Too many students struggle not because they lack ability, but because they lack access to or awareness of available help, lack a clear academic or career plan, and feel disconnected from institutional resources."

The Student Success Center represents a strategic response to critical challenges identified through qualitative and quantitative data analysis, including needed student support experiences, and equity gaps in retention and completion rates. By centralizing support services into one student-centered hub, Kubatzke said the initiative will integrate academic advising, success coaching, wellness services and basic needs insecurity supports.

The center will address these barriers through several key components.

Academic advisors, success coaches and student support specialists will work collaboratively to ensure students receive personalized guidance that adapts to their individual needs.

Rather than waiting for students to seek help, the center will use early alert systems and data analytics to identify students who may be struggling and connect them with appropriate interventions.

A structured assessment tool will guide advising and coaching caseloads, ensuring consistent, high-quality support for all students.

Beyond academics, the center will help students navigate wellness resources and basic needs support.

The initiative builds on extensive research and institutional data, including student surveys, focus groups, CARE Team insights, and stop-out and retention analysis. According to the release, this approach aligns with institutional strategic pillars of academic excellence and student success.

"The Student Success Center will allow us to walk alongside students from the moment they consider enrolling until the day they complete their goals," said Leslie Navarro, associate dean of student success and well-being, in the release. "By bringing advising, success coaching, wellness, and basic needs support together in one place, we can respond more quickly, build stronger relationships, and remove barriers that too often derail students' progress."

Planning for the center will begin this spring, and LMC officials anticipate this coordinated approach will improve student engagement, planning and success outcomes.

Photo provided / South Haven Area Emergency Services

South Haven Area Emergency Services responders test out the Jaws of Life during a recent training session.

SHAES officials secure new tools for extrications

By TRIBUNE STAFF

SOUTH HAVEN — South Haven Area Emergency Services has put into service new electric-powered extrication tools that were bought from donations to the department.

According to a news release from SHAES, the new Jaws of Life equipment replaces 27-year-old hydraulic tools.

Lead donors toward the $30,000 project included the Greater South Haven Area Community Foundation, the WR Grace Foundation, the Rotary Club of South Haven, Gridlife and Tris 4 Health for their donation after the recent triathlon.

SHAES Executive Director Brandon Hinz said the tools are used primarily at vehicle crashes when occupants are trapped inside.

"This investment is enhancing our operational capabilities, ensuring that our personnel have dependable, modern equipment during critical rescue operations," Hinz said in the release.

Fundraising efforts are currently underway to secure an additional set of tools so each of the three SHAES stations is equipped with the tools, said Firefighter/Paramedic Paul Pant who is heading the initiative.

MSU Extension to host Horticultural Days

By TRIBUNE STAFF

BENTON TOWNSHIP — The 2026 Southwest Michigan Horticultural Days will be held Feb. 4-5 at Lake Michigan College's Mendel Center in Benton Township.

According to a news release, it is organized each year by the Michigan Grape Society and Michigan State University Extension.

These two days of educational sessions will cover general information, smart farm/precision agriculture, and pesticide regulations and compliance topics on Day 1, and then Day 2 will cover topics on juice and wine grapes, blueberries, strawberries and raspberries, as well as tree fruit. MSU Extension educators and outside experts will provide informative talks and answer questions in the educational sessions.

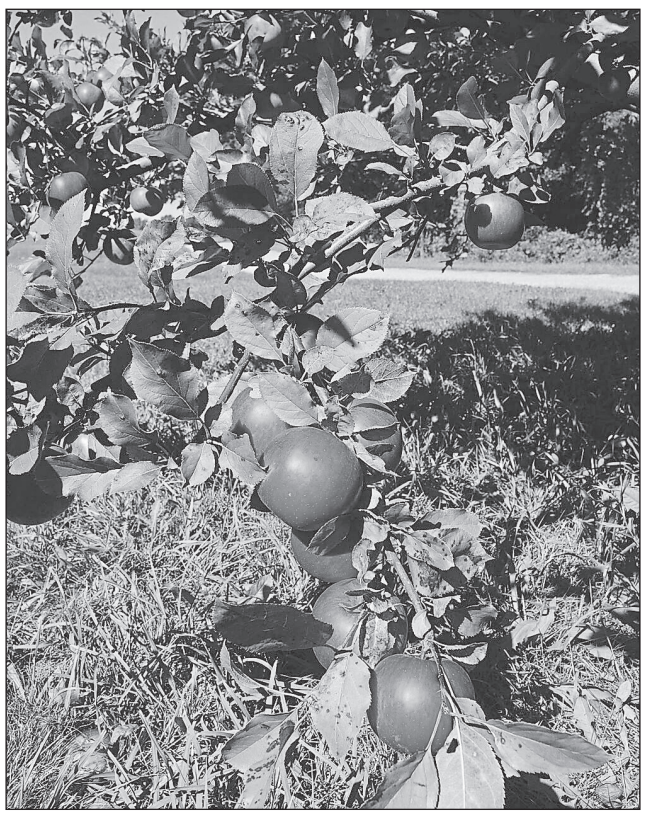
Registration and the trade show begin at 8 a.m. and the educational sessions start at 9 a.m. on both days. A wine showcase free for all attendees will be held Feb. 4.

Pre-registration for both days is $60 per person, postmarked before Jan. 16, 2026. Registrations for both days postmarked after Jan. 16, 2026, online and at the door, will be $75 per person. Single-day registrations are available for a $15 discount off the full-event registration price.

Anyone with questions regarding registration may contact Renee Tinkey at 269-944-1477, ext. 201, or by emailing tinkeyre@msu.edu.

Checks should be made payable to Michigan Grape Society. They can be mailed to MSU-SWMREC, 1791 Hillandale Road, Benton Harbor, MI 49022, Attn: Renee Tinkey.

Please visit michigangrapesociety.simpletix.com to register online with credit card payment or to access a registration form to mail in with a check payment.



Don Campbell / HP file photo

Horticulture Days will be held Feb. 4-5 at Lake Michigan College Mendel Center. The two-day event is a conference for specialty crop growers in Southwest Michigan.

Time magazine names 'Architects of AI' as its person of the year for 2025

By MIKE CATALINI
Associated Press

The "Architects of AI" were named Time's person of the year for 2025 on Thursday, with the magazine citing this year as when the potential of artificial intelligence "roared into view" with no turning back.

"For delivering the age of thinking machines, for wowing and worrying humanity, for transforming the present and transcending the possible, the Architects of AI are TIME's 2025 Person of the Year," Time said in a social media post.

The magazine was deliberate in selecting people – the "individuals who imagined, designed, and built AI" – rather than the technology itself, though there would have been some precedent for that.

"We've named not just individuals but also groups, more women than our founders could have imagined (though still not enough), and, on rare occasions, a concept: the endangered Earth, in 1988, or the personal computer, in 1982," wrote Sam Jacobs, the editor-in-chief, in an explanation of the choice. "The drama surrounding the selection of the PC over Apple's Steve Jobs later became the stuff of books and a movie."

One of the cover images resembling the "Lunch Atop a Skyscraper" photograph from the 1930s shows eight tech leaders sitting on the beam: Meta CEO Mark Zuckerberg, AMD CEO Lisa Su, Tesla CEO Elon Musk, Nvidia CEO Jensen Huang, OpenAI CEO Sam Altman, the CEO of Google's DeepMind division Demis Hassabis, Anthropic CEO Dario Amodei and AI pioneer Fei-Fei Li, who launched her own startup World Labs last year.

Another cover image shows scaffolding surrounding the giant letters "AI" made to look like computer componentry.

It made sense for Time to anoint AI because 2025 was the year that it shifted from "a novel technology explored by early adopters to one where a critical mass of consumers see it as part of their mainstream lives," Thomas Husson, principal analyst at research firm Forrester, said by email.

The magazine noted AI company CEOs' attendance at President Donald Trump's inauguration this year at the Capitol as a herald for the prominence of the sector.

"This was the year when artificial intelligence's full potential roared into view, and when it became clear that there will be no turning back or opting out," Jacobs wrote.

AI was a leading contender for the top slot, according to prediction markets, along with Huang and Altman. Pope Leo XIV, the first American pope whose election this year followed the death of Pope Francis, was also considered a contender, with Trump, Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and New York Mayor-elect Zohran Mamdani topping lists as well.

Trump was named the 2024 person of the year by the magazine after his winning his second bid for the White House, succeeding Taylor Swift, who was the 2023 person of the year.

The magazine's selection dates from 1927, when its editors have picked the person they say most shaped headlines over the previous 12 months.

Donald King / AP

A sign for Time magazine is displayed outside the New York Stock Exchange on Thursday in New York.

South Haven Tribune

CLASSIFIEDS

Classified Desk: 1-855-317-4292

Hours: Monday - Friday 9am-2pm EST

monster

0100 ANNOUNCEMENTS

WE BUY JUNK CARS!
DAMAGED? TOTALED?
BROKEN? NOT RUNNING?
WRECKED?

CALL 269-500-1711

0500 MERCHANDISE

MOTORCYCLES & SNOWMOBILES WANTED
$$ CASH PAID $$
ALL MAKES AND MODELS

269-500-1711

0900 LEGALS

STATE OF MICHIGAN
PROBATE COURT
COUNTY OF VAN BUREN

FILE NO.
2025 2116 GM & 2025 2118 GM

PUBLICATION OF NOTICE

In the matter of:
Natalie Garcia Brown and Arnaldo Garcia Brown

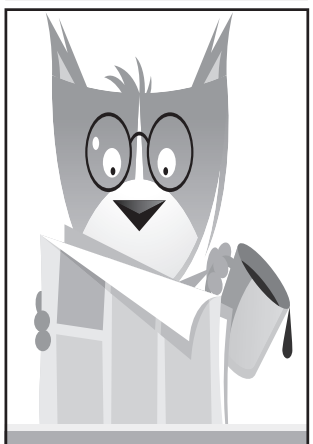
TO THE INTERESTED PERSONS: *
Jacques Market Brown

whose address(es) are unknown and whose interest in the matter may be banned or affected by the following:

TAKE NOTICE: *
A hearing will take place on 1/15/2026 at 10:00 am for a Petition for Appointment of Guardian of a minor(s)- Full Guardianship. This Hearing will be in Courtroom #3 with Judge Susan Metzger P62867

Date 11/25/2025

Petitioner
Samantha Jo Garcia
303 W. Cass St.
Bangor, MI 49013



GET MORE LOCAL NEWS, DELIVERED RIGHT TO YOU!

GIVE US A CALL AND SUBSCRIBE TODAY!

0900 LEGALS

STATE OF MICHIGAN
PROBATE COURT
COUNTY OF VAN BUREN

FILE NO.
2025 2119 GM & 2025 2120 GM

PUBLICATION OF NOTICE

In the matter of:
Ivan Gallegos and Jaun Gallegos Jr.

TO THE INTERESTED PERSONS: *
Juan Pablo Gallego Sanchez

whose address(es) are unknown and whose interest in the matter may be banned or affected by the following:

TAKE NOTICE: *
A hearing will take place on 1/15/2026 at 10:00 am for a Petition for Appointment of Guardian of a minor(s)- Full Guardianship. This Hearing will be in Courtroom #3 with Judge Susan Metzger P62867

Date 11/25/2025

Petitioner
Maria Del Carmen Garcia
303 W. Cass St.
Bangor, MI 49013

RESERVE THIS SPACE
TODAY!

Vibracoustic USA, Inc. has an opening for Supplier Development Engineer in South Haven, MI, responsible for working closely with Commodity Managers to improve, manage and develop the current supplier base in the Americas while supporting Vibracoustic overall company performance goals. Bachelor's Degree (or foreign academic equivalent) in Mech. Eng., Eng. Mgmt, or a related degree field & 10 yrs of exp. in the position offered or related occupation. Must have Exp. with quality fields such as IATF 16949/VDA and quality core tools; Exp. with high-pressure die casting (HPDC) and stampings; Exp. with technical audits and CQI requirements; Exp. with FMEA, APQP, MSA, and SPC; Exp. with software programs LiveSource, SAC, SAP, AutoCad and SolidWorks; Exp. with Quick Response Quality Control (QRQC); Exp. with Minitab Software; and Exp. with rubber bonding adhesive material and processes such as roll coating, chain on edge, etc. This is a hybrid position following 6 mos. of full-time in-person employment whereby the employee will work both from home up to two days a week. Hence, the employee must live within a reasonable commuting distance of the aforementioned office address. International and domestic travel required, between 50 and 70%. Any applicant who is interested in this position should apply at https://jobs.freudenberg.com/freudenberg/job/details/3913690/.

Vibracoustic USA, Inc. has an opening for Application Engineer - Project Manager in South Haven, MI, responsible for realizing acquisition of target projects in cooperation with Sales including technical presentations at customers. Bachelors in Mech. Eng., Eng. Mgmt., Logistics & Supply Chain Mgmt., Ind. Eng. (or foreign academic equivalent); or related degree field & 2 yrs. exp. as an App. Eng., Proj. Mgr., or related Auto Proj. Mgmt. Must have Exp. with: NVH & Rubber Products; Proj. Mgmt. software & tools (MS Project, Gantt Charts, and APQP); Critical Path Method (CPM), Cost-Benefit Analysis, Project budget tracking, Project financials & quoting, PMP Certification; the development of automotive components including dampers, bushings, decoupling systems, and spring isolators; FMEA, GD&T, DVP&R, and PPAP, Feasibility Studies, design to cost, design for manufacturing, and lean manufacturing; cost analysis and problem solving methodology in the automotive industry (Ishikawa, 5 whys, etc.). This is a hybrid position following 6 mos. of full-time in-person employment whereby the employee will work both from home up to two days a week. Hence, the employee must live within a reasonable commuting distance of the aforementioned office address. This position requires international and domestic travel, as needed, up to 20%. Any applicant who is interested in this position should apply at jobs.freudenberg.com/Freudenberg/job/details/3914229/.

PUBLIC/LEGAL NOTICES

To place a public notice, please send your requests to legals@pmginmi.com.

Please allow 48 hours to process, larger legals may need at least four business days.

Extra Business is as easy as asking for it!

DO IT HERE, DO IT NOW!

Classifieds Make A Cash Connection!

Staying on track

Eden Springs Park brings back train rides for holidays

By LOUISE WREGE
Paxton Media Group

BENTON TOWNSHIP — Eden Springs Park at House of David is once again twinkling during its annual Holiday Train Rides, which will take place later this month.

The remaining train rides are available from 5-8 p.m. Dec. 20-21 at 789 M-139 in Benton Township, said Tom Kecseg, a member of the Eden Springs board, which is nonprofit.

"We have a concession stand and there's popcorn, hot chocolate, donuts, cookies and some other goodies," he said. "Then, we also have Santa Claus, whose going to be there every night and give out candy canes. He's in our heated museum."

The cost is $5 for everyone over the age of 3 – cash only.

Rides were supposed to also take place this weekend, but were canceled for bad weather. More information can be found on the Eden Springs Park at House of David Facebook page.

The forecast for this Saturday and Sunday calls for sub-zero wind chill temperatures, which can result in frostbite and hypothermia.

"We are closing this weekend out of an abundance of caution for the safety of park visitors and volunteers," the nonprofit posted on Facebook. "We will consider rescheduling these dates for later this month."

Besides Santa Claus, Kecseg said other photo opportunities are sitting in a sleigh with lighted reindeer and at the candy cane house.

He said an army of volunteers has been working nonstop to put up decorations since just after Labor Day, when they started putting up Halloween decorations.

"And then as soon as Halloween is over, we take down all the Halloween decorations and then put up the Christmas decorations," he said.

Kecseg said several volunteers work every day for five to six hours a day to prepare the park for the two holidays.

Helping to decorate earlier this year were volunteers from LECO Corp., he said.

"This is the third year of them doing that," he said.

Kecseg said they started with a handful of decorations a few years ago, and it has grown from there.

"Every year, we build it up with more and more decorations, and it seems like more and more people come out," he said.

One night during the Halloween train rides, he said more than 800 people attended.

Kecseg said putting on the holiday train rides gives back to the community by giving people something fun to do. In addition, he said it's their biggest fundraiser.

"We're a nonprofit, but we have bills just like everybody else does," Kecseg said.

The money is used to not only pay the bills, but to repair engines and buildings at the park, he said.

Contact: lwrege@TheHP.com, 932-0361, Twitter: @HPWrege

Photos by Tony Wittkowski / Paxton Media Group

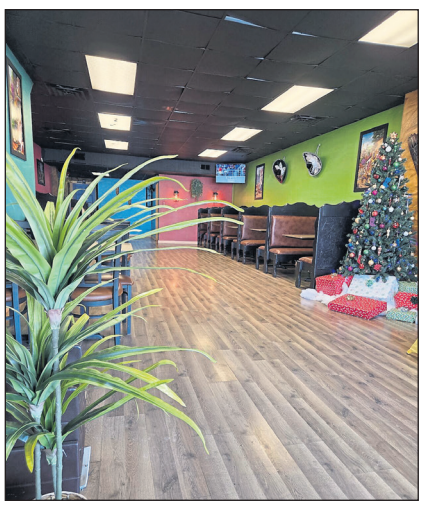
Attendees brave the cold weather for a Holiday Train Ride on Tuesday night at Eden Springs Park at House of David in Benton Township.

Carolers from the St. Joseph High School Choir sing festive songs Tuesday night at Eden Springs Park at House of David in Benton Township.

Santa Claus poses for a photo with Trey Rusbasan, 14, Aleksandra Rusbasan, 17, Tristan Werner, 15, and Gabriella Rusbasan, 11, on Tuesday night at the Eden Springs Park at House of David in Benton Township.

Brothers launch authentic Mexican eatery in Bangor

The South Haven Area Chamber of Commerce recently welcomed El Sombrero in Bangor as a new member with a ribbon cutting ceremony.



Photos provided

El Sombrero is a family-owned business dedicated to serving authentic Mexican cuisine.

By TRIBUNE STAFF

BANGOR — The South Haven Area Chamber of Commerce recently welcomed El Sombrero Mexican Restaurant as a new chamber member.

According to a news release, the restaurant was founded by brothers José Pérez and Luis Pérez.

El Sombrero brings the flavors and traditions of Guanajuato, Mexico to Bangor, Mich.

"From tacos and burritos to quesadillas, fajitas and menudo, every dish is crafted with quality ingredients and a commitment to the flavors of home," the release stated.

Built from years of experience in the restaurant industry, El Sombrero is a family-owned business dedicated to serving authentic Mexican cuisine.

"Our mission is simple," José Pérez said in the release. "We want every guest to feel welcomed and connected, like they're walking into our family's kitchen. Joining the Bangor community means so much to us, and we hope to give back, support local events and become a place where families gather, celebrate and create memories."

For more information about El Sombrero Mexican Restaurant, go to order elsombrero.com.

W. Mich. has economic momentum, but sees signs of slowdown

By JUSTIN A. HINKLEY
Bridge Michigan

West Michigan remains a leader in job and population growth across Michigan, but there are signs momentum has slowed amid staffing challenges, tariffs and the rise of artificial intelligence.

Forty-six percent of Grand Rapids-area companies said in 2025 they were planning to expand, down from 52 percent the year before, according to data presented Thursday at an event hosted by economic development firm The Right Place.

Forty-three percent of businesses said they were planning to hire, down from 45 percent.

Population growth in the region slowed from nearly 1 percent in 2024 to 0.4 percent in 2025, while the number of jobs in the region has remained mostly flat at around 600,000 for the last three years, the data showed.

"The economy overall has kind of plateaued" after climbing out of the coronavirus pandemic, Randy Thelen, president and CEO of The Right Place, told Bridge Michigan in an interview. "The growth is not quite where we'd like to see it."

While the heads of regional companies in 2023 said their biggest obstacle was finding talent, they've said sales were a challenge the last two years. Essentially, companies are now fighting for a share of the market instead of fighting for a slice of a growing pie, Thelen said.

But companies still worry about finding employees with the right kinds of skills in an increasingly tech-driven economy, Andy Johnston, senior vice president of strategic initiatives at the Grand Rapids Chamber, told Bridge Michigan in a separate interview.

"They're not just looking for bodies," Johnston said. "They're looking for a little bit more than that right now."

As President Donald Trump returned to office, Grand Rapids-area companies were concerned early in the year about the impact of tariffs on their bottom lines, Johnston said, but "the business community has accepted that" as the year ends.

As it has in almost every market, the rise of artificial intelligence has also disrupted portions of the Grand Rapids region. In October, major financial services company Acrisure announced it would lay off 400 people, including about 200 in west Michigan, because it had automated some of its work with AI.

Thelen said AI didn't concern him because, as happened with previous technological advancements, employees will find different ways to use their skills. There are fewer travel agents today as people book their trips on apps, but the economy still added jobs after that shift, he said.

"A moment of transition can be a challenge," Thelen said, "but long-term, the economy will find a way."

Despite the slowdown signs, the Grand Rapids region remains a leader for economic development around Michigan and the country.

The Grand Rapids area's population growth remained on-par with the national rate and was more than double the statewide rate of less than 0.2 percent, according to The Right Place's latest State of the Region report. The area's growth ranked 15th among 20 growing metro regions around the country against which The Right Place compares Grand Rapids.

Key, Thelen said: Compared to those 20 growing markets, Grand Rapids ranked fifth in adding 25- to 34-year-olds, with a more than 14 percent increase this year in the number of younger workers.

"That helps signal to employers … there's going to be an available workforce going forward," Thelen said.

Grand Rapids has set its sights on growing the share of its workforce in tech jobs, and the region ranked 10th among those 20 benchmark metros, with 6.5 percent of its workforce in tech. Ann Arbor and Detroit ranked fourth and fifth, respectively.

In overall job growth, Grand Rapids ranked 12th among the 20 benchmark regions. The Lansing region ranked third, though state forecasts say west Michigan will exceed the Lansing region in job growth long-term.

The Grand Rapids region's industrial vacancy rate stands at about 3 percent, compared to nearly 8 percent nationally, and its office vacancy rate is 13 percent, compared to about 19 percent nationally.

And the region is largely ahead of the game on The Right Place's strategic plan, according to Thursday's presentation.

South Haven
Performance Series

Holiday Concert Featuring
VOX GR Choral Ensemble

Sunday, December 21
4:00 p.m.

Peace Lutheran Church
06321 Blue Star Highway, South Haven, MI 49090

ADMISSION FREE

The acclaimed Vox GR is the premier professional choral ensemble in West Michigan. The ensemble's concert theme will be "Northern Lights" featuring a wonderful repertoire of holiday music.

The South Haven Performance Series thanks its many friends for supporting its 15th season. In appreciation, admission to this concert is free. Donations will be welcomed in support of our 2026 Season.

www.southhavenperformanceseries.com Follow us on Facebook

SOUTH HAVEN COMMUNITY CALENDAR

Photo provided / Tom Renner

Isaac Chalupa goes for the basket during the South Haven boys basketball season opener with a 64-13 home victory over Watervliet.

Ongoing events

Visually impaired and blind persons support group meeting: Every third Wednesday of the month at 1 p.m. at Senior Services of Van Buren County.

Dementia and Alzheimer's caregivers support group meeting: Every third Wednesday of each month at 6 p.m. at Peace Evangelical Lutheran Church library.

Three Blondes Brewing: Trivia night on Thursdays at 7 p.m. and 8 p.m. and Sundays at 1 p.m. and 2 p.m.

Sparkle and Spice Boutique: Mom and Me play date. Fridays from 9-10 a.m.

South Haven Center for the Arts: Center Studio for adults from 6-8 p.m. on the first and third Wednesday of the month. Artists of any level can bring their own projects to work on. Basic art supplies will be available. Attendees must be 18 years old and over. Members are free, non-members cost $5.

South Haven Center for the Arts: Center Studio for ages 9 to 13 from 4-5:30 p.m. every Wednesday. Young artists are invited to create art at their own pace with an instructor to help guide as needed. Free workshop but a $10 donation is suggested to help cover cost of supplies.

Candlelight Yoga: Thursdays at 7:30 p.m. at the Church of Epiphany. Cost is $15.

Food pantry: First Congregational Church open from 10 a.m. to noon on Mondays, Wednesdays and Fridays. It is a drive-up food pantry.

Food pantry: Sacred Heart Catholic Church. For Bangor residents only. Open from 1-4 p.m. on Thursdays.

Food, clothing, baby pantry: Lily of the Valley Church in Covert. Open from noon to 2 p.m. on Wednesdays. Must call the central office to register.

Personal care and clothing pantry: First Assembly of God open from 10 a.m. to 1 p.m. on Wednesdays. Must call the central office to register.

Baby pantry: Peace Lutheran Church open from 9 a.m. to 3 p.m. Monday through Friday. Must call the central office to register.

Baby pantry: Simpson United Methodist Church in Bangor. Open from 10 a.m. to noon on Tuesdays. Must call the central office to register.

South Haven Memorial Library: Story Time on 11 a.m. to noon on Tuesdays through May 26, 2026.

HawksHead: Pasta on the Patio every Wednesday at 5 p.m.

Michigan Maritime Museum: Hands-on the Harbor every Thursday at 10:30 a.m.

Liberty Hyde Bailey Museum: "The Story of Snow" by Mark Cassino and John Nelson Ph.D. Storywalk. The museum is now closed but appointments can be scheduled by calling the museum.

Lakeside Social Bowling Alley: Glow Bowl every Friday from noon to 9 p.m.

Bridge: Chicago Scoring – 1 pm Tuesdays. Lakeside Social, 9921 Blue Star Memorial Highway, South Haven.

Bridge: Duplicate Scoring – 1 pm Wednesdays. Lakeside Social, 9921 Blue Star Memorial Highway, South Haven.

Michigan Maritime Museum: free admission on the first Sunday of every month from November through April.

First United Methodist Church: Free meals every Tuesday night. Doors open at 5:30 p.m. Meal is served at 6 p.m.

Lake Michigan College South Haven Campus: Technology Help Workshops from 11 a.m. to 1 p.m. every Thursday through Dec. 11.

December

14 – South Haven Center for the Art: Mistletoe Market from 11 a.m. to 4 p.m.

15 – Covert Branch Library: After school art workshop for grades 6 to 12 from 3 to 5 p.m.

16 – Basketball: Girls freshman basketball against Plainwell Schools at 4 p.m.

16 – Basketball: Girls junior varsity basketball against Black River Public School at 5:30 p.m.

16 – Basketball: Girls varsity basketball against Black River Public School at 7 p.m.

16 – Swimming: Boys varsity swimming against Harper Creek High School at 6 p.m.

17 – Michigan Maritime Museum: Holiday Twilight Concert featuring the Kal-Haven Strings from 6:30 to 7:30 p.m. Free concert with a $5 donation or a non-perishable food item.

18 – Bowling: Boys and girls varsity bowling against Comstock at 4 p.m.

18 – First United Methodist Church: Free meal. Doors open at 5:30 p.m. and the meal is served at 6 p.m.

19 – Basketball: Girls varsity basketball against Fennville High School at 6 p.m.

19 – Basketball: Boys varsity basketball against Fennville High School at 7:30 p.m.

19 – South Haven Memorial Library: Messy Play for preschoolers from 11 a.m. to noon.

20 – South Haven Memorial Library: Free STEM activities event from 11 a.m. to noon.

20 – Michigan Maritime Museum: Selfies with Santa from 11 a.m. to 3 p.m.

20 – Michigan Maritime Museum: Cookies and Cocoa with Captain Bob from noon to 1 p.m.

21 – South Haven Performance Series: Choral ensemble Vox GR to perform at 4 p.m. at Peace Evangelical Lutheran Church.

22 – Covert Branch Library: After school art workshop for grades 6 to 12 from 3 to 5 p.m.

29 – Covert Branch Library: After school art workshop for grades 6 to 12 from 3 to 5 p.m.

31 – New Years Eve Celebration: Downtown South Haven.

January

2 – South Haven Memorial Library: Play-doh play date at 11 a.m.

5 – Covert Branch Library: After school art workshop for grades 6 to 12 from 3 to 5 p.m.

6 – Basketball: Girls freshman basketball against Hartford Public Schools at 4 p.m.

6 – Basketball: Girls junior varsity basketball against Climax-Scotts High School at 5:30 p.m.

6 – Basketball: Girls varsity basketball against Climax-Scotts High School at 7 p.m.

7 – Basketball: Boys freshman basketball against Brandywine Senior High School at 4 p.m.

7 – Basketball: Boys junior varsity basketball against Brandywine Senior High School at 5:30 p.m.

7 – Basketball: Boys varsity basketball against Brandywine Senior High School at 7 p.m.

9 – Basketball: Boys freshman basketball against Benton Harbor High School at 4 p.m.

9 – Basketball: Boys junior varsity basketball against Bridgman Public School at 5:30 p.m.

9 – Basketball: Boys varsity basketball against Bridgman Public School at 7 p.m.

12 – Basketball: Boys freshman basketball against Michigan Lutheran High School at 4 p.m.

12 – Basketball: Boys junior varsity basketball against Buchanan High School at 5:30 p.m.

12 – Basketball: Boys varsity basketball against Buchanan High School at 5:30 p.m.

13 – Swimming: Boys varsity swimming against Hastings High School at 6 p.m.

14 – Bowling: Boys and girls varsity bowling against Allegan Public Schools at 4 p.m.

15 – Basketball: Boys freshman basketball against Allegan Public Schools at 4 p.m.

15 – Basketball: Girls junior varsity basketball against Allegan Public Schools at 5:30 p.m.

15 – Basketball: Boys junior varsity basketball against Allegan Public Schools at 7 p.m.

16 – South Haven Memorial Library: Messy Play for preschoolers from 11 a.m. to noon.

19 – Covert Branch Library: After school art workshop for grades 6 to 12 from 3 to 5 p.m.

20 – Basketball: Boys freshman basketball against Hastings High School at 4 p.m.

20 – Basketball: Girls middle school basketball against Saugatuck High School at 5 p.m.

20 – Basketball: Boys junior varsity basketball against Black River Public School at 5:30 p.m.

20 – Basketball: Boys varsity basketball against Black River Public School at 7 p.m.

20 – Swimming: Boys varsity swimming against Allegan Public School at 6 p.m.

21 – Wrestling: Boys and Girls varsity wrestling at 6 p.m.

22 – Basketball: Boys freshman basketball against Watervliet High School at 4 p.m.

22 – Basketball: Girls junior varsity basketball against Watervliet High School at 5:30 p.m.

22 – Basketball: Boys junior varsity basketball against Watervliet High School at 7 pm.

22 – Bowling: Boys and girls varsity bowling against Parchment High School at 4 p.m.

24 – South Haven Memorial Library: Astronomy Club fro kids starting at 11 a.m.

26 – Covert Branch Library: After school art workshop for grades 6 to 12 from 3 to 5 p.m.

27 – Wrestling: Boys and girls varsity wrestling at 6 p.m.

28 – Basketball: Girls middle school basketball against Black River Public School at 4 p.m.

28 – Basketball: Girls freshman basketball against Zeeland West High School at 4 p.m.

28 – Basketball: Girls junior varsity basketball against Zeeland West High School at 5:30 p.m.

28 – Basketball: Girls varsity basketball against Zeeland West High School at 7 p.m.

28 – Bowling: Boys and girls bowling against Martin Public School at 4 p.m.

29 – Basketball: Girls middle school basketball against Lakeshore High School at 5:30 p.m. All-area tournament.

30 – Girls varsity basketball against Coloma High School at 6 p.m.

30 – Boys varsity basketball against Coloma High School at 7:30 p.m.

Jobless benefit applications jump to 236K last week

By MATT OTT
Associated Press

WASHINGTON — The number of Americans applying for unemployment benefits jumped last week, but remain in the same historically healthy range of the past few years despite growing concern over the health of the labor market.

U.S. jobless claim applications for the week ending Dec. 6 climbed by 44,000 to 236,000 from the previous week's 192,000, the Labor Department reported Thursday. That's more than analysts' forecast of 213,000 new applications.

The previous week's figure, analysts say, was distorted by the Thanksgiving holiday.

Applications for unemployment aid are viewed as a proxy for layoffs and are close to a real-time indicator of the health of the job market.

Despite what on the surface appears to be a historically healthy job market, the Federal Reserve trimmed its benchmark lending rate by a quarter-point on Wednesday, its third straight cut.

Fed Chair Jerome Powell said the committee reduced borrowing costs out of concern that the job market is even weaker than it appears. While government data shows that the economy has added a sluggish 40,000 jobs a month since April, Powell said that figure could be revised lower by as much as 60,000. That would mean employers have actually been shedding an average of 20,000 jobs a month since the spring.

"It's a labor market that seems to have significant downside risks," Powell told reporters. "People care about that. That's their jobs."

Jobless claims figures in recent years have remained in a historically healthy range, suggesting that overall layoffs have been muted despite some high-profile job cuts. Hiring is also sluggish, which makes finding a job for those out of work challenging.

For now, the U.S. job market appears stuck in a "low-hire, low-fire" state that has kept the unemployment rate historically low.

Last week, private payroll data firm ADP estimated U.S. job losses of 32,000 in November. The surprisingly weak report comports with recent government employment data, which has shown a significant decline in job growth since President Donald Trump implemented his sweeping tariffs on U.S. trading partners in April.

Though September had a solid gain of 119,000 jobs, June and August both showed net job losses. The unemployment rate has inched up to 4.4 percent, its highest level in four years.

November's comprehensive jobs data has been delayed for release until next week due to the government shutdown.

Job cuts announced recently by large companies such as UPS, General Motors, Amazon and Verizon typically take weeks or months to fully implement and may not be reflected in Thursday's data.

The Spotlight

A Weekly Guide To Services & Business Around Town.

Confused about your health insurance options?
Under 65 health plan available now
Call Dale K. Morgan "DK"
Your local Medicare expert since 1994
269-637-6619

JENSEN'S EXCAVATING INCORPORATED
Driveways • Water & Sewer • Septic Systems • Demolition
Crushed Concrete • Sand • Gravel • Stone • Topsoil
www.JensensExcavating.com
(269) 637-5642

Driver's License Restoration
It's a Process... We Can Help!

Drunk Driving & Criminal Defense
"Friends... Don't Let Friends Plead Guilty!"

Law Office of Frederick J. Taylor
269-388-6060 1-800-250-FRED

MILLER
D.L. MILLER FUNERAL HOME, INC.
Bangor Chapel
258 W. Monroe Street
Bangor, MI 49013
(269) 427-7551
Ryan K. Oliver, Owner/Manager
Bloomingdale Chapel
203 East Spring
P.O. Box 171
Bloomingdale, MI 49026
(269) 521-3121
Floyd Decker, Manager

If interested in including your business here contact freid@thehp.com

FOCUS

Deagreez / Getty Images

We are hardwired to sing – and it's good for us, too

By ELINOR HARRISON
Lecturer, Performing Arts Department, Faculty Affiliate, Philosophy-Neuroscience-Psychology, Washing (The Conversation)

On the first Sunday after being named leader of the Catholic Church in May 2025, Pope Leo XIV stood on the balcony of St. Peter's Basilica in Rome and addressed the tens of thousands of people gathered. Invoking tradition, he led the people in noontime prayer. But rather than reciting it, as his predecessors generally did, he sang.

In chanting the traditional Regina Caeli, the pope inspired what some have called a rebirth of Gregorian chant, a type of monophonic and unaccompanied singing done in Latin that dates back more than a thousand years.

The Vatican has been at the forefront of that push, launching an online initiative to teach Gregorian chant through short educational tutorials called "Let's Sing with the Pope." The stated goals of the initiative are to give Catholics worldwide an opportunity to "participate actively in the liturgy" and to "make the rich heritage of Gregorian chant accessible to all."

These goals resonated with me. As a performing artist and scientist of human movement, I spent the past decade developing therapeutic techniques involving singing and dancing to help people with neurological disorders. Much like the pope's initiative, these arts-based therapies require active participation, promote connection, and are accessible to anyone. Indeed, not only is singing a deeply ingrained human cultural activity, research increasingly shows how good it is for us.

The same old song and dance

For 15 years, I worked as a professional dancer and singer. In the course of that career, I became convinced that creating art through movement and song was integral to my well-being. Eventually, I decided to shift gears and study the science underpinning my longtime passion by looking at the benefits of dance for people with Parkinson's disease.

The neurological condition, which affects over 10 million people worldwide, is caused by neuron loss in an area of the brain that is involved in movement and rhythmic processing – the basal ganglia. The disease causes a range of debilitating motor impairments, including walking instability.

Early on in my training, I suggested that people with Parkinson's could improve the rhythm of their steps if they sang while they walked. Even as we began publishing our initial feasibility studies, people remained skeptical. Wouldn't it be too hard for people with motor impairment to do two things at once?

But my own experience of singing and dancing simultaneously since I was a child suggested it could be innate. While Broadway performers do this at an extremely high level of artistry, singing and dancing are not limited to professionals. We teach children nursery rhymes with gestures; we spontaneously nod our heads to a favorite song; we sway to the beat while singing at a baseball game. Although people with Parkinson's typically struggle to do two tasks at once, perhaps singing and moving were such natural activities that they could reinforce each other rather than distract.

A scientific case for song

Humans are, in effect, hardwired to sing and dance, and we likely evolved to do so. In every known culture, evidence exists of music, singing or chanting. The oldest discovered musical instruments are ivory and bone flutes dating back over 40,000 years. Before people played music, they likely sang. The discovery of a 60,000-year-old hyoid bone shaped like a modern human's suggests our Neanderthal ancestors could sing.

In "The Descent of Man," Charles Darwin speculated that a musical protolanguage, analogous to birdsong, was driven by sexual selection. Whatever the reason, singing and chanting have been integral parts of spiritual, cultural and healing practices around the world for thousands of years. Chanting practices, in which repetitive sounds are used to induce altered states of consciousness and connect with the spiritual realm, are ancient and diverse in their roots.

Though the evolutionary reasons remain disputed, modern science is increasingly validating what many traditions have long held: Singing and chanting can have profound benefits to physical, mental and social health, with both immediate and long-term effects.

Physically, the act of producing sound can strengthen the lungs and diaphragm and increase the amount of oxygen in the blood. Singing can also lower heart rate and blood pressure, reducing the risk of cardiovascular diseases.

Vocalizing can even improve your immune system, as active music participation can increase levels of immunoglobulin A, one of the body's key antibodies to stave off illness.

Singing also improves mood and reduces stress.

Studies have shown that singing lowers cortisol levels, the primary stress hormone, in healthy adults and people with cancer or neurologic disorders. Singing may also rebalance autonomic nervous system activity by stimulating the vagus nerve and improving the body's ability to respond to environmental stresses. Perhaps this is why singing has been called "the world's most accessible stress reliever."

Moreover, chanting may make you aware of your inner states while connecting to something larger. Repetitive chanting, as is common in rosary recitation and yogic mantras, can induce a meditative state, inducing mindfulness and altered states of consciousness. Neuroimaging studies show that chanting activates brainwaves associated with suspension of self-oriented and stress-related thoughts.

Singing as community

Singing alone is one thing, but singing with others brings about a host of other benefits, as anyone who has sung in a choir can likely attest.

Group singing provides a mood boost and improves overall well-being. Increased levels of neurotransmitters such as dopamine, serotonin and oxytocin during singing may promote feelings of social connection and bonding.

When people sing in unison, they synchronize not just their breath but also their heart rates. Heart rate variability, a measure of the body's adaptability to stress, also improves during group singing, whether you're an expert or a novice.

In my own research, singing has proven useful in yet another way: as a cue for movement. Matching footfalls to one's own singing is an effective tool for improving walking that is better than passive listening. Seemingly, active vocalization requires a level of engagement, attention and effort that can translate into improved motor patterns. For people with Parkinson's, for example, this simple activity can help them avoid a fall. We have shown that people with the disease, in spite of neural degeneration, activate similar brain regions as healthy controls. And it works even when you sing in your head.

Whether you choose to sing with the pope or not, you don't need a mellifluous voice like his to raise your voice in song. You can sing in the shower. Join a choir. Chant that "om" at the end of yoga class. Releasing your voice might be easier than you think.

And, besides, it's good for you.

The Conversation is an independent and nonprofit source of news, analysis and commentary from academic experts. This article is republished under a Creative Commons license. Read the original article at https://theconversation.com.

FOCUS

Spencer Platt / Getty Images / TNS

A person rides an electric bicycle through the streets of Manhattan on Nov. 15, 2022, in New York City. Electric bicycles, which have surged in popularity with both delivery workers and commuters, run on lithium-ion batteries which can be combustible when charging, especially cheaper models. Some New York City landlords are banning electric bicycles from their buildings following a series of fires, one in Manhattan this month which sent 43 people to the hospital after a faulty bike battery left charging by a tenant caught fire.

Kids and teens go *full throttle* for E-bikes as federal oversight stalls

By KATE RUDER
KFF Health News (TNS)

LOUISVILLE, Colo. — E-bike of Colorado sales manager Perry Fletcher said his sales and repair shop saw an increase in back-to-school sales to young riders and families this fall as the popularity of the battery-powered bicycles revs up.

But the kids' excitement for their new rides is tempered by a recurring question from worried parents: Are they safe?

That can be a difficult question to answer. The federal government's e-bike regulations are sparse, and efforts to expand them have stalled, leaving states and even counties to fill the void with patchwork rules of their own. Meanwhile, the seemingly endless variety of e-bikes for sale vary in design, speed, and quality.

In that environment, retailers like Fletcher aim to educate consumers so they can make informed decisions.

"We're super careful about what comes in the shop because there are hazards," he said.

Federal rules requiring safety standards for batteries in e-bikes and other devices such as e-scooters are in limbo after the Consumer Product Safety Commission, the independent federal regulatory agency meant to protect people against death and injury from bicycles and other consumer products, withdrew proposed regulations in August.

The commission then sent the rules for review by the Office of Information and Regulatory Affairs inside the Office of Management and Budget, responding to President Donald Trump's February executive order demanding that independent agencies like the CPSC be more aligned with White House priorities. In May, Trump fired three members of the commission who had been appointed by his predecessor, former President Joe Biden.

Meanwhile, separate proposed rules by the commission to address injuries from mechanical failings have languished. Shira Rawlinson, the CPSC's communications director, said it plans to update the status of both proposed rules.

That leaves e-bikes subject to existing standards written for traditional bicycles and which the commission has said, based on a preliminary assessment, aren't adequate to reduce the risk of e-bike injuries. Colorado, Minnesota, and Utah recently passed laws regulating e-bikes to fill the gap.

The laws address issues such as battery fire risks and rider safety and seek to distinguish lower-speed e-bikes from faster e-motos, or electric motorcycles, which can reach top speeds of 35 miles an hour or faster. No federal law dictates the age at which someone may operate an e-bike, but more than half of states have age restrictions for who can operate Class 3 bikes, which reach a top speed of 28 miles an hour, while two California counties recently set a minimum age to operate Class 2 bikes, with their 20 mph top speed.

"The biggest issue is e-bikes that switch from a power-assisted bike to essentially a motorized scooter," said Democratic state Rep. Lesley Smith, who co-sponsored Colorado's bill.

Colorado's e-bike law requires safety certification of lithium-ion batteries, which can explode when manufactured or used improperly. They caused 39 deaths and 181 injuries in people using micromobility devices such as e-bikes from 2019 to 2023, according to the CPSC.

Most dealers, importers, and distributors have agreed to use batteries that meet safety standards, but there will always be manufacturers who cut corners on safety to save money, said Ed Benjamin, chairman of the Light Electric Vehicle Association, whose hundreds of members supply light electric vehicles such as e-bikes, or their parts.

"There are some out there who don't care what is the right thing to do. They just want to make the cheapest bike possible," Benjamin said.

Amy Thompson, the Safe Routes to School program coordinator for the Boulder Valley School District, said education officials are scrambling to install more bike racks at several schools to meet the increase in e-bike usage.

Students use them to quickly get to school or activities and carry their sports equipment or instruments with ease, Thompson said. She said she's seen some alarming behavior, such as students' riding three to a bike, riding without helmets, or attempting power wheelies popularized by social media.

Thompson said kids are disabling the speed limiter on e-bikes to operate at higher speeds. "It's super easy for kids to go on YouTube and find a video that will coach you how to override or disable the governor on a bicycle," she said.

Thompson alerted parents to monitor their children's e-bikes in September and described the blurred lines between e-bikes and e-motos last fall.

Those blurred lines bedevil an e-bike classification system adopted, in part or full, by nearly all states, in which e-bike motors generally must operate at 750 watts or lower. Class 1 e-bikes use pedal assist and must not exceed 20 mph; Class 2 e-bikes include a throttle and also must not exceed 20 mph; and Class 3 e-bikes use pedal assist that must not exceed 28 mph.

Some e-bikes easily switch between Class 2 and 3, sometimes unbeknownst to parents, said Smith, the Colorado lawmaker. A California parent sued an e-bike manufacturer last year, saying it falsely advertised as Class 2 an e-bike that could switch to Class 3.

The dangers of Class 2 e-bikes prompted California's Marin County to ban children under 16 from operating them and require that anyone riding one wear a helmet. Youths ages 10 to 15 who crash their e-bikes require an ambulance at five times the rate of other age groups involved in e-bike crashes, according to county health officials. A growing number of serious injuries on e-bikes, particularly among adolescents, is an emerging public safety problem, the American College of Surgeons said in June.

Talia Smith, Marin County's legislative director, championed the California law that permits Marin County to impose age restrictions. After hearing from a dozen other counties experiencing similar problems, though, she said state legislators should move to a statewide law from piecemeal, county-by-county ordinances. San Diego County bans riders under 12 from operating Class 1 or 2 bikes.

Vehicles claiming to be both e-bikes and e-motos fall into the cracks between two regulatory agencies, the CPSC and the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration, said Matt Moore, general and policy counsel for PeopleForBikes, a trade association for bicycles, including e-bikes.

PeopleForBikes wants the traffic safety administration to stop shipments of or take other legal action against e-motos that are labeled as e-bikes and do not comply with federal standards, Moore said.

If the federal government won't act, states should clarify their laws to define e-motos as off-road dirt bikes or motor vehicles that require licenses, he said. In October, California defined e-motos, which it requires to display an identification plate issued by the Department of Motor Vehicles for use off-highway.

In Boulder, Thompson said, the school district considers communication and education cornerstones of safety. Children and teens should learn and practice traffic rules, whether they're powering two wheels with their own legs or a throttle, she said.

"E-bikes are fun, environmentally friendly, and relatively cheap transportation. So how can we make them safer and more viable for families?" Thompson said..

KFF Health News is a national newsroom that produces in-depth journalism about health issues and is one of the core operating programs of KFF – the independent source for health policy research, polling and journalism.

Photos by Brian Cassella / Chicago Tribune / TNS

Claudia von Mallinckrodt stands in front of a piece of art she found at the curb and now displays at home Nov. 16 in Hinsdale. Under the name Claudia von Thrift, the tech worker runs a social media account called The Rich Goodwill where she documents things people leave out with the trash.

Her *Rich Goodwill* account is *TikTok famous* for the stuff she finds in suburban trash

By CHRISTOPHER BORRELLI
Chicago Tribune (TNS)

Claudia von Mallinckrodt collects toys left out with the trash Nov. 16 in Hinsdale. Under the name Claudia von Thrift, the tech worker runs a social media account called The Rich Goodwill where she documents things people leave at the curb and offers them to her followers.

CHICAGO — Claudia von Thrift – which is not her real name, but we'll get to that – wants to make something clear. She is not one of those don't-buy-anything-this-Christmas people. She is not looking to take an activist stance against conspicuous consumption. "I am as bougie as they come," she said, reaching into her utensil drawer and pulling out a very expensive silver knife. She owns several of these, she said. She does buy lavish things. She will not apologize for spending extra money on anything she won't need to replace.

She went into a closet.

She emerged with a plaid winter trench coat from Burberry, the kind that would cost the month's rent for a very nice apartment. A couple of decades ago, when Claudia von Thrift was in high school in Glen Ellyn, she wore this coat all the time. Her family had serious money. She drove their BMW because her father wouldn't let her drive one of his Porsches. She is bluntly disarming about her background. Her family was extremely wealthy, and for a while, Christmas – she waves her hands above her, as if conjuring a rain of a palatial, old-world opulence – meant tens of thousands of dollars of presents.

Her eyes go wide as she says this; she's not exaggerating.

All of this is important to know if you're going to understand why Claudia von Mallinckrodt, 35, a pretty well-off tech sales professional and Hinsdale resident with two kids and a husband who works in private equity, transformed this year into Claudia von Thrift, a popular influencer with almost one million followers and a compelling, thoughtful and even shocking purpose: She wants to show you what her rich neighbors throw out.

She wants to show you the original paintings they leave in the trash, the new children's bikes they set on the curb for anyone to take, the perfectly clean Ralph Lauren blankets, the high-end strollers, the air fryers, the Pottery Barn rugs, the West Elm home furnishings, the Crate & Barrel loungers, the Vineyard Wine sweaters. One morning at her house, she showed me a $400 artificial Christmas tree from Target she had pulled off a curb the day before. It was still in its box. Beside it were plastic tubs of garland.

Her videos, which she posts on Instagram and TikTok as The Rich Goodwill, are not shaming or accusatory. She doesn't zoom in on enormous homes themselves. She focuses on their trash and steers away from larger points about sustainable living and unchecked consumerism and the vast divide in social classes around Chicago. But if your algorithm lands on her videos with any regularity, it's hard not to feel those things.

She hunts around the western suburbs whenever she finds time. She leaps out of her car and inspects anything by the side of the road that appears promising. If it seems almost new – she tends not to restore or refurbish anything – she loads it into her SUV, then posts a video online and tells her followers: If you want this, DM me. Then she just gives it to them. She never charges them. She's even shipped things on her own dime.

She calls it "rehoming."

Her mother, she says, has bugged her: "She gets ticked off – 'You're giving away things and you could resell them online for $100 or more.' But number one, I don't need the money, and number two, I tell her, 'You don't understand Mom, bear with me.' When I started showing her checks I was getting from TikTok, she said, 'OK, I get it.'" Since spring, Claudia von Thrift has made more than $20,000 from TikTok alone.

She says she is making a point about buying less and that she doesn't want your stuff in a landfill, contributing to environmental collapse – she's just not going to say it outright.

The roots of all this, after all, are personal – almost superhero-origin-like in their drama.

"My family had a number of tragedies, all at once," she explains. Her parents got divorced and her father lost his company during the mortgage implosion of 2008, then more money when other businesses went south. "You think the worst is over, until my dad's house burned down." According to von Mallinckrodt, there was no insurance bailout. She was at Pepperdine University in Malibu when her mother called: The house was gone, they'd lost almost everything, including the dogs. The family went on food stamps.

"I remember going into a community center to get meals and my sister recognized people, so we're walking through with our heads down. We were not able to buy food, yet at the same time, I never wanted people to know we had no money. So about then, I started to spend a lot of my time trying to find nice things that cost way less. That tends to make you notice just how nice some secondhand things actually are. Even if I did buy new, I was making sure it was like 80 percent off. I was trying to cover up my shame."

By the time she and her husband moved to Hinsdale a couple of years ago, she was astonished at the prosperity by the side of its roads, among recycling bins and leaf bags. Claudia von Mallinckrodt doesn't say this in a self-aggrandizing way. She's not self-righteous. She knows she was comfortable once, temporarily less comfortable, and now comfortable again. She says it because she wonders if her neighbors know how cavalier they can be with what they own. "That experience made me notice how much beauty and usefulness can still exist in things others overlook," she says.

But mostly, she says it because she can't believe her luck.

Before we went curb shopping, we sat beneath a $700 West Elm chandelier she found and kept for herself. In the next room was a large painting someone had left out, its price tag ($2,100) still attached. Beside it were a trio of thin, decorated Christmas trees she found. Upstairs in the kids' room, an elegant velvet rocking chair – another find. Mondays are trash days, so she goes out every Sunday. She always finds something.

She's often told to hunt on the North Shore, in Lake Forest and Winnetka and Wilmette, but she's fine in Hinsdale, which often ranks among the top 10 wealthiest suburbs in the nation, ahead of the North Shore. Before I can even ask, she answers the obvious:

"I don't really know why people leave stuff like this on their curbs. I don't, not really. People read so many different things into this. It's very debatable. Are people guarding their stuff instead of taking the time to donate it? I would bet eight out of 10 times, they're hoping for someone like me to come along and just take it. But what if it isn't picked up, right? I do see things marked as trash, with a $4 trash sticker attached (for oversized trash items). I meet homeowners who say, 'You saved me from buying a sticker.' Are people so rich that they don't take time on this nitty-gritty? Or are rich people just constantly changing their styles because they can afford it? Probably that, too. Some of it is generational – they don't feel as sentimental about stuff that was passed down. You see a lot of toys because their kids are going through phases. They could find a way to donate that, except that also takes time. I assume, in their hearts, they want someone to have it, and they're doing a good thing. Or maybe that is a whole other conversation."

She's short and speaks in a loud, confident voice and has pale blue eyes and comes off slightly intense, though totally ready for primetime. She has heard she has some haters in town, locals who don't like seeing their homes flash by in the backgrounds of her videos. She suspects some of that hate has come from just how quickly she's taken off.

Last year, while on maternity leave, she found herself driving daily to a nearby Goodwill known for high-end luxury items – "the rich Goodwill." In January, back at work and mourning those hunts, she started to stop for curbside finds and film the results. Her first videos were nothing special, images of her treasure with a text narration. But she liked it so much she wondered if she could be an influencer, so she watched a 20-minute video about social-media algorithms, and she began putting herself in her posts. Her videos, which were getting about 1,000 or so views, began getting 700,000 views. Then 3.9 million views. Then 6.2 million. She's since been contacted by at least two TV production companies, and she's starting to get recognized in the supermarket.

On a bright Sunday morning, before heading out on another hunt, a car backed into von Mallinckrodt's driveway and popped its hatchback. Layla Judah, a follower from Gurnee, had arrived to pick up a child's plastic water table. She's becoming a regular. "Claudia is just super cool," she said, sounding like one of the many comments on von Mallinckrodt's videos. "You kind of get a high off this!"

"You do!" von Mallinckrodt said.

A few minutes later, we set out.

And immediately passed Judah, who was inspecting a new curbside toy a block away. "That's so great," von Mallinckrodt said, looking delighted. "I want to destigmatize this." That said, von Mallinckrodt herself still gets nervous. She prefers to stop at homes that don't have any residents in front. She doesn't want to be confronted. She works quickly.

She drives slowly.

She leaned forward in her seat and scanned her head at every intersection. She's stop and go, stop and go. After college, before moving back to Illinois, she worked as a private investigator. You can see those chops. "You train yourself to pay attention. You notice stuff on the curb casually, but once you're actively paying attention, you start to see everything." We stop at a pair of upholstered chairs; she loads the one less worn into her SUV. We continue, haltingly. She takes long, quiet moments, then continues on.

"For a while my neck hurt," she said. "The constant swiveling. But I've built a muscle."

She spots a rolled-up rug between boxes.

She jumps out and bends and inspects the back of it. "Oh my god! Pottery Barn! That seals the deal." She shoulders the rug and slides it into the trunk of the SUV. Her 3-year-old son hums to himself in the back and watches the curled rug poke over the seat.

We drive past stacks of cardboard and rows of leaf bags.

"OMG!" she shouts.

Ahead of us is a children's firehouse, its large fabric facade fitted onto a metal framework. She pulls in front of its house. The garage door is open. People are home. She gets nervous. She speedwalks to the trash, inspects and reports, "Crate & Barrel!" She pulls fabric off of frame, tears down the metal poles and bundles everything into her arms and walks to the car. She looks like a bank robber with her arms full of loose cash.

"Whoo!" she shouts.

She's breathless, so excited that she's forgotten to film herself. That firehouse, she'll give her children for Christmas. They'll be getting several curbside finds. She sits for a second, then pops open her door and returns for two rubber toy animals. She loads them in, too. She can't help herself, she explains. She figured the hunt would take hours, but within 20 minutes, the car was packed and we headed to her house for unloading.

She draws out the rug and uncurls it in her backyard.

"People ask if I'm afraid of bedbugs, and no, I'm not – I mean, you see where these rugs come from." She studies it. There's a small hole in the center, the width of a pole. She pulls out her phone and turns on the camera and tells her followers this is a Pottery Barn, and there is a hole, but know what? Just put something over that and you're good.

"Just let me know if you want it."

FOCUS

4-day school weeks

are growing in popularity

There is still a lack of data on the effects

By ROBBIE SEQUEIRA
Stateline.org (TNS)

Northeast of the capital city of Des Moines in central Iowa, the 400-student Collins-Maxwell Community School District is one of many across the state shifting to a four-day school week.

Like many rural K-12 schools, the district has struggled to find teachers, and it sees the four-day week as a useful recruiting tool. It also wants to curb student absences, which tend to spike on Mondays and Fridays.

The district maintained its traditional five-day calendar in August and September. But from now on, with scattered exceptions, the middle school and high school in the Collins-Maxwell district will be closed on Mondays. To meet Iowa's minimum number of instructional hours, the district will lengthen the other days during four-day weeks.

Superintendent Marc Snavely said he watched nearby schools transition to shorter weeks and was intrigued by the reports he got from his counterparts in other districts. Snavely hopes the shorter week will boost teacher morale, reduce burnout, and make the rural district more competitive with nearby districts that are larger and can offer teachers better pay.

"Ultimately, the 'why' behind the four-day school week came down to staff recruitment and retention," Snavely said in an interview. "We felt being a small school district, the four-day week would allow us to better compete."

He added that surrounding schools with four-day weeks said they experienced fewer discipline problems and improved attendance. And rural school districts across the country tout the four-day work week as a way to stretch tight school budgets amid K-12 funding uncertainties at the federal and state levels.

But despite the reports of higher attendance and calmer classrooms, education researchers say the evidence tells a more complicated story.

Emily Morton, lead researcher for the Northwest Evaluation Association, which creates standardized testing for K-12 schools, cautioned that the promised benefits have not shown up in the data. Moreover, longer school days can harm academic performance, Morton said.

But such concerns might not matter as four-day school weeks become more popular nationwide.

"One thing that does show up clearly is that there is an extremely high approval rating for these policies," Morton said. "Parents and students overwhelmingly want to stay on a four-day week once they have it."

A rural trend

There are more than 2,100 schools in 26 states using four-day weeks, according to researchers at Oregon State University. In Iowa, the number of districts on a four-day schedule has grown from six in 2023-24 to more than two dozen in 2025. In Colorado, two-thirds of districts are on the altered schedule.

But so far, it's almost entirely a rural phenomenon.

"To my knowledge, there's not a single urban district using a four-day week," Morton said. "What a four-day week looks like in a rural community is very different from what people in suburban or urban areas imagine."

Dr. Shanon Taylor, an education professor at the University of Nevada, Reno who studies school scheduling, said districts typically adopt the model for economic and staffing reasons, not academic ones. Rural districts often save money on transportation, utilities and building operations, she said, and the promise of permanent three-day weekends helps recruitment efforts.

However, the burden of accommodating this transition may fall heavily on parents who work five days a week, and especially on the parents of younger students who must find a child care alternative on the selected day off.

"The research is still mixed," Taylor said. "We don't yet have decisive evidence showing academic benefits or drawbacks."

In June, researchers at the University of Oregon published a review of 11 studies on four-day school weeks, which included data on academic achievement, attendance, discipline and criminal activity. The impact of a four-day week varied based on grade level and on location, the Oregon researchers found, but overall "there was no evidence of large positive effects."

They also noted that "maintaining activities that foster healthy youth development on the fifth day is important for minimizing other negative impacts."

State vs. local clashes

In some states, the policy has sparked conflict between state and local officials.

"There's a lot of tension between state leaders and rural districts over whether the four-day week is something the state should allow," said Morton. "In Oklahoma, when the state tried to take it away, districts simply shifted to 'virtual Fridays' – and instruction mostly didn't happen."

The Oklahoma Council of Public Affairs, a conservative think tank, found through a public records request that more than 100 Oklahoma districts had at least one school where students had at least two full weeks' worth of "virtual days" in the 2022-23 school year. More than 60 districts had at least one school that went online for three weeks or more. During many of those days, there was minimal live instruction.

In response, Oklahoma this year enacted a law that restricts public schools' ability to shift to virtual learning. The measure limits districts to two days of virtual instruction each school year, and only allows them under certain circumstances, such as a state of emergency declared by the governor.

Missouri enacted a law in 2024 requiring that certain big city, charter and county districts obtain voter approval before adopting or continuing a four-day week. The Independence School District, a 14,000-student suburban system on the edge of Kansas City that switched to the shorter week in 2023-24, has since sued the state, alleging the law unconstitutionally targets certain districts based on arbitrary criteria such as county size.

Last year, a New Mexico mandate for districts to adopt calendars with more school days was halted in court. And Arkansas legislators considered a bill that would allow for range of instructional times from 160 to 190 days, which would be contingent on a school's rating. A large number of rural districts there have moved to four-day schedules.

Meanwhile, uncertainty over the costs and benefits of the approach are likely to persist.

Morton, the education assessment researcher, said that small rural districts might not be equipped to determine whether a four-day week produces benefits until further studies are conducted across the country.

"Even if your test scores stay flat, nearby districts might be rising, so your 'flat' could actually be a negative effect," she said. "States need to equip districts with what national research shows, because local data will never be able to answer these questions alone."

Stateline is part of States Newsroom, a national nonprofit news organization focused on state policy. Visit at stateline.org.

SpiffyJ / Getty Images

ENTERTAINMENT

The cast of the Broadway production of "Liberation" by Bess Wohl, directed by Whitney White.
Little Fang / TNS

Characters are breaking the fourth wall to *confront* and *galvanize* audiences

By CHARLES MCNULTY
Los Angeles Times (TNS)

LOS ANGELES — Characters stepping out of their plays to address an audience is hardly a new phenomenon. Playwrights have been breaking the fourth wall ever since that invisible barrier separating the actors from the audience was raised.

Sophocles, of course, didn't need Oedipus to chat directly with the audience. He had a chorus to provide running commentary. Shakespeare, whose theatrical sensibility was informed as much by Renaissance and Classical poetry as by those pageant wagons boisterously bringing miracle plays directly into the lives of townsfolk, had no compunction about a character slipping out of the frame to help audience members arrange their imagination. He even enlists Rosalind in "As You Like It" and Prospero in "The Tempest" to bid their audiences farewell.

The fourth wall, encoded in the architecture of the proscenium stage, fosters the illusion that audiences are eavesdropping on a cordoned off reality. As the modern theater embraced realism, plays were carefully designed not to wrench their auditors from their waking dream. Maintaining a semblance of truth, as Samuel Taylor Coleridge pointed out in the context of poetry, was necessary to procure "that willing suspension of disbelief for the moment, which constitutes poetic faith."

"Willing" is a key word. Art invites complicity, and in the theater, audiences are in on the game. As Samuel Johnson sagely points out in his "Preface to Shakespeare," "The truth is, that the spectators are always in their senses, and know from the first act to the last, that the stage is only a stage, and that the players are only players."

How could it be otherwise? As Johnson reminds us, "If we thought murders and treasons real, they would please no more."

In the Neoclassical era, playwrights were exhorted to observe the unities (of time and place, in particular) to facilitate an audience's belief. But modern playwrights, particularly those who see their roles as storytellers, have resisted such superficial strictures.

The memory play, perfected by Tennessee Williams in "The Glass Menagerie," asks the protagonist to serve also as narrator, setting the scene, reflecting on the action and fast-forwarding the story at will. Irish dramatist Brian Friel, a born raconteur, was a master of this use of direct address, writing monologues for his main characters that not only launched his tale but engulfed his audience in the right lyrical mood.

These writers create an environment in which characters can enter or exit the main storyline as if from a magic door. Audiences are cognizant of this portal, but they are encouraged to forget its existence when the drama ramps up, thereby allowing them to have their cake and eat it too.

A friend of mine hates when a character goes rogue and starts chatting up the audience. "Why are you talking to me?" she mumbles in faux outrage. "I paid to watch you talk to each other."

Perhaps she considers it a dramatic cheat, as though the writer were copping out of the hard work of dramatization. But I have the opposite reaction. I find that playwrights are often at their liveliest when writing in a presentational mood. What they sacrifice in illusionist power, they gain in freedom.

In "Love! Valour! Compassion!," Terrence McNally, a master of direct address, intensifies the emotional climax of his play by having his characters step forward and explain how and when they will die. This poignant comedy, about a group of gay male friends spending summer holidays together during the height of the AIDS epidemic, gathered the audience in a communal huddle of collective grief while urging survivors – everyone in attendance – to keep the faith.

In times of emergency, it's natural to want to draw the public's attention to the shared moment. The theater affords a space – one of the few left in our digitalized world – for this kind of reflective gathering.

Breaking the fourth wall is a tried-and-true method of calling an audience to attention. But a new breed of dramatist, writing in an age of overlapping calamities – environmental, political, economic, technological and moral – is retooling an old playwriting device to do more than inject urgency and immediacy in the theatrical experience.

Characters are not just stepping out of the dramatic frame – they are blurring the line between art and life. Performers are dropping their masks, or at the very least shuffling them, to force us to think harder about what we're all doing in the theater as the world around us burns.

Bess Wohl's "Liberation," one of the best plays of the year, is having its Broadway premiere this season at the James Earl Jones Theatre under the direction of Whitney White (who matches her fine ensemble job with "Jaja's African Hair Braiding"). The play, an imaginative account of a group of women banding together in a gymnasium during the early days of the women's rights movement, begins with a performer checking in on us.

"Hi. Is everyone – is everyone good? Comfortable? Snacks unwrapped? Hello. Hi. Welcome."

Lizzie, the author's surrogate (luminously played by Susannah Flood), greets us with the skittish confidence that will turn out to be one of the character's most charming qualities. She apologizes that theatergoers have had to lock their phones in Yondr pouches. (Cameras are off-limits in a production that has some nudity.) But she immediately confronts the question on everybody's mind: How long is the play?

Honestly, it's not even your fault, it's like, this is the modern condition – not to sound grandiose, 'this is the modern condition,' but honestly – it's like, you decide to come, you get dressed up – Well all right, you didn't get dressed up – but you put on clothes, thank you for that. You put on clothes. You make your way through whatever you went through – the subway, the traffic, the hellscape that is Times Square – you finally get here, and then you hope that the entire experience will be as short as humanly possible.

Theatergoers seem thrilled that after all the effort they made to be there, they're not being ignored as usual. But Wohl isn't pandering to them. She's connecting to them in the present before ushering them into the past.

Her project, as Lizzie explains in her introduction, is memory – memories belonging to her mother (who recently died) and to her mother's friends, who set out to change the world. Blazing a trail for women's equality, they help transform society, even if incompletely. A momentous accomplishment, but then why Lizzie asks, "Why does it feel somehow like it's all slipping away? And how do we get it back?"

The play rewinds to the 1970s, to a local rec center in Ohio, where a few pioneering women with little in common, beyond the everyday sexism that has hemmed in their lives, form a consciousness-raising group. Lizzie's mother, also named Lizzie (and also played by Flood) is the ringleader, but a tentative one – as apologetically undeterred as her daughter.

Wohl is writing a personal history that is not her own. She sets up her play to make clear that this theatrical re-creation is her attempt to understand what happened in those meetings of unlikely revolutionaries. She provides space for the women to object to her version of events and to challenge her interpretation of motives.

In one scene, in which Lizzie is about to meet the man who will become her husband, Lizzie the daughter and de facto author interrupts the play to enlist another actor (Kayla Davion, superb) to play her mother. Young Lizzie is understandably squeamish to enact a love scene with the man who will turn out to be her father.

The playfulness of Wohl's style, while at times informal to the point of desultory, treats the past as an autonomous reality. The playwright can only engage her mother's history from her position in the present. She can imagine, she can theorize, she can try to do justice. But she isn't permitted to subjugate her characters to advance her own agenda, no matter how well-intentioned. The personal is political, as the feminist rallying cry has it, and Wohl has taken pains never to lose sight of this insight when imagining the complexities of the lives of others.

"Prince Faggot," by Jordan Tannahill, is built on the reaction to an effete photo of Prince George of Cambridge at the age of 4 that went viral. The play, originally produced by Playwrights Horizons and Soho Rep, is at off-Broadway's Studio Seaview through Dec. 13. It imagines a queer life for William and Kate's pride and joy as this young royal defiantly and decadently comes of age.

It's a daring premise, full of presumption and not really defensible from the standpoint of a real-life boy who doesn't deserve to be made the object of a sexual fantasia. But Tannahill doesn't evade these tricky moral questions.

Performer 1 (Keshav Moodliar on the night I attended), who plays both the playwright's surrogate and George's future lover, debates the issues with the company. One by one, the queer and trans cast members share fictionalized personal stories, harking back to childhood moments before any declaration of identity was possible.

A thought experiment is under way in this seductively febrile production directed by Shayok Misha Chowdhury (whose play "Public Obscenities" was a 2024 Pulitzer Prize finalist). How might the lives of the characters (and by extension all our lives) be different if heterosexuality weren't the default assumption?

Intellectual license granted, the company is allowed to run riot in a performance work that maintains a Brechtian distance between actor and role. A playwright's note in the script clarifies that "with the exception of Performer 4's final monologue" (which was "inspired by a rehearsal hall interview with actress N'yomi Allure Stewart"), the rest of the play, "including the direct address monologues, is fictional, written by the playwright, and any resemblance to real events is purely coincidental."

The audience can't help but be conscious of the daredevil performers impersonating these royal celebrities, intimate friends and overzealous handlers, exposing their bodies, if not their own biographies, in a work that realizes in performance Picasso's assertion of art being "the lie that enables us to realize the truth."

"Table 17," Doug Lyons' meta-theatrical rom-com, which ended its run at the Geffen Playhouse on Sunday, has its character routinely check in with the audience as Jada (Gail Bean) and Dallas (Biko Eisen-Martin) review what led to their breakup. The location for this amorous autopsy is a fashionable restaurant in which the host/pinch-hit server (gamely incarnated by Michael Rishawn) functions as the show's bitchy chorus.

Lyons has the characters directly engage the audience in a production directed by Zhailon Levingston that incorporated the energy of British pantomime. Theatergoers were encouraged to express their feelings in a comedy that pays homage, as the playwright notes in his script, to such popular Black films as "Love & Basketball," "Poetic Justice" and "Love Jones."

The direct address monologues, Lyons stresses, should have "a stand-up comedy feel to them. In these moments the audience is no longer a spectator, but an active participant in the story."

"Table 17" is more modest in its ambition than either "Liberation" or "Prince Faggot." It mostly wants to divert. But there was something bracing about the circuitry it created with an audience. Theater wasn't being imposed onto a paying public. It was instead a shared endeavor, mutually manufactured in yet another instance of a play letting down its guard to reach new levels of aliveness.

SERIES REVIEW

Matt Klitscher / Starz / TNS

Graham McTavish, left, and Nick E. Tarabay in "Spartacus: House of Ashur."

With no shortage of blood and lust, *'Spartacus: House of Ashur'* is exactly what fans expect

By ROBERT LLOYD
Los Angeles Times (TNS)

Everything is a matter of taste, and most people know what they like. If you are not already aboard the "Spartacus" express, of which "Spartacus: House of Ashur" is the fifth installment and the first since 2013, you should know in short order whether its mix of soft porn, graphic violence and scrabbling for power is your goblet of wine.

In this reboot, piloted again by Steven S. DeKnight and premiering this week on Starz, Ashur (Nick E. Tarabay), who was a bad guy in the previous series, killed by Spartacus on Mount Vesuvius, finds himself in the underworld, facing Lucy Lawless, returning for a cameo as Lucretia, who recaps the story and sends him back to Earth in a timeline where he killed Spartacus instead – no reason given, or how it's being managed. And, presto, Ashur wakes up in bed with "body slaves" Hilara (Jamaica Vaughan) and Messia (Ivana Baquero) as the boss of the ludus – a school for gladiators – where he once was employed by Lucretia's husband. (And not a very pleasant boss, either.)

All that business with Spartacus and his slave rebellion is done. There is some political backdrop to the show, with Pompey and Crassus going at each other offscreen and an amusingly narcissistic Julius Caesar (Jackson Gallagher) dropping in to draw attention to himself. But at least for the five episodes, out of 10, available to review, "House of Ashur" is mostly a sort of show business story, as Ashur attempts to get his troupe into the big time while banking on an untested newcomer. Call it "Gold Diggers of 71 BC." With sex and blood.

The newcomer is Achillia (Tenika Davis), a newly enslaved Nubian Ashur finds down at the docks taking apart her guards. (In her lust for freedom, she's the Spartacus of this "Spartacus.") But the boys at the ludus, whose ranks notably include decent guy Celadus (Dan Hamill) and his hotheaded son Tarchon (Jordi Webber), are not keen to admit a woman to their ranks and are doubly peeved that Ashur is skipping her into a headlining role. For her part, she's got a lot a lot of learning to do; trainer Korris (Graham McTavish), the person here you'd most want on your side, may be of help. Ashur doesn't actually tell her, "You're going out a youngster but you've got to come back a star," as Warner Baxter said to Ruby Keeler, but the idea is roughly the same.

Ashur's juggling for a spot on the bill at the big arena brings him into contact with the hoi polloi of Capua, the town where the story takes place; they generally regard him as something to avoid stepping in. (That he's an ex-slave and a Syrian, whom people call "the Syrian," doesn't help.) This gang includes rival Proculus (Simon Arblaster) and his trio of deadly little people, Senator Gabinius (Andrew McFarlane); Real Housewife of Capua, Cossutia (Claudia Black); and their lovely young daughter Viridia (India Shaw-Smith), who has been holed up at home since the death of her husband in the Spartacus wars.

'Spartacus: House Of Ashur'

Rating: TV-MA

How to watch: 9 p.m. ET Fridays on Starz

The dialogue appears crafted to set a world record for profanity; practically the only adjective these people use begins with "F." At the same time, there is a sort of Shakespearean lilt to much of it; many lines, in my random examination, resolve into iambic pentameter. Most notably, there's an attempt to mirror Latin grammar by omitting articles and possessive pronouns: "We stray from point." "What do eyes behold?" It's a cute but nonsensical idea that just makes the characters come off as comical; there are no articles in Russian either, but we add them when we translate Chekhov, or else Vanya and Yelena would sound like Boris and Natasha. (The original "Spartacus: Blood and Sand" didn't bother with this device, though it did have characters saying "gratitude" for thanks and "apologies" for sorry.)

The series takes its melodrama seriously, with evident dedication to its staging its complicated fight scenes, of which there are many, and its investment in sets and costumes and effects; the fake blood budget alone must be staggering. (The domestic architecture accords with the Life in Ancient Rome videos I've been known to watch, minus the wall paintings, which would, of course, cost more money, and distract the eye from the orgies.) And yet so extreme is it in its violence, and so resolute in its naughtiness, that I also find the series kind of hilarious. It possibly doesn't help that whenever I hear the name Spartacus I think of Tom Everett Scott declaring "I am Sparta-coos" in "That Thing You Do," and sometimes of Magnus Scheving as Sportacus, the athletic superhero of the 2004 kids show "LazyTown." But that's on me.

MOVIE REVIEW

'Merrily We Roll Along' captures a bittersweet Broadway musical on film

By GEMMA WILSON
The Seattle Times (TNS)

"Merrily We Roll Along" might be the most fun you can have at an existential crisis.

A repeated question forms the heartbeat of this musical, Stephen Sondheim (music and lyrics) and George Furth's (book) piece about friendship and love, art and show business, selling out and growing up: "How did you get to be here? What was the moment?"

A hugely successful Broadway revival, filmed for theatrical release live at New York City's Hudson Theatre in June 2024, is now landing on screens nationwide.

It's the story of three best friends: composer Franklin Shepard (Jonathan Groff), playwright Charley Kringas (Daniel Radcliffe) and novelist Mary Flynn (Lindsay Mendez). At least, that's who they were – or thought they were going to be, back when identities were straightforward and uncomplicated by the passage of time.

This show's moments run backward in time, from the trio's cynical, fractured middle age in 1976 to the moment they all first met on a New York rooftop in 1957, assembled in the middle of the night to watch Sputnik in orbit and witness the beginning of a new, idealistic era in American culture.

But in 1976 Frank is producing movies and on his way to a third wife, Mary's drinking too much and Charley … where is Charley? Who knows, but he's written a Pulitzer-winning play. Mary was once a bestselling novelist, and Charley and Frank wrote hit musicals together. Before that, they were just three talented kids determined to make it big.

'Merrily We Roll Along'

★★★

MPA rating: PG-13 (for drug use, some strong language and smoking)

Running time: 2:30

How to watch: In theater

In between they have moments of success and failure, love and betrayal, weddings and births and unrequited loves. There's the disastrous TV interview where Charley finally blows up his relationship with Frank, their first big Broadway hit and the satirical revue in a basement theater that first got them noticed.

"Merrily" is also inextricably linked to, perhaps burdened by, its own history. The show has long been famous among Broadway flops, for how quickly it closed in 1981 (though it did win a well-deserved Tony Award for best original score) and for closing a yearslong collaborative chapter between Sondheim and director Harold Prince – a painful irony considering that the show was, at least in small part, based on the friendship between Sondheim, Prince and Mary Rodgers.

Sony Pictures Classics / TNS

From left, Daniel Radcliffe, Jonathan Groff and Lindsay Mendez in "Merrily We Roll Along."

It's been revived semiregularly over the years, but never to such rapturous response as this production, which opened off-Broadway in 2022 before moving to Broadway in 2023.

Translating a work staged in a theater – particularly a musical – onto film without losing its structure is exceedingly tricky. And it is an act of translation, because the two forms use different artistic languages and dictate a viewer's focus in entirely different ways. Stage and screen director Maria Friedman focuses this story tightly on Frank (both figuratively and literally, on film), cursed with overwhelming talent and overweening ambition. From the opening frame this is his story, a close-up on his numb face an acid contrast to the upbeat music picking up around him.

But it's the trio that gives this story liftoff, thanks to spectacular performances from Groff, Radcliffe and Mendez as friends who have seen each other through their best and worst moments. Broadway veterans all, they have incredible facility with Sondheim's difficult music and deliver performances with such interiority that they read well on camera and reach the back of a Broadway theater.

Also excellent are Katie Rose Clarke as Frank's first wife Beth, Krystal Joy Brown as his second (more glamorous) wife Gussie and Reg Rogers as Broadway producer Joe Josephson. (And, not for nothing, the variety in voices throughout the cast is marvelous, and not a lineup of identically bright tones that sound run through what I like to call the BFA garlic press.)

Sondheim favored the bittersweet over the black and white, but not bittersweet in a soft-focus nostalgia way, more a twist-of-the-knife way. When we hear the ballad "Not a Day Goes By" sung during Beth and Frank's wedding vows, we've already heard it sung during their divorce. That's not wistful, that's agonizing.

So, how did you get to be here? Ask your friends. Life is a million tiny choices, and a person who changes rarely notices how far they've gone; it's those waiting at home who feel the distance. And both firmly believe their version of events, as Mary well knows:

"Trouble is, Charley, that's what everyone does: Blames the way it is on the way it was – on the way it never, ever was."

Cover art for Audrey Hobert's debut album "Who's the Clown?"
Lenne Chai / TNS

Audrey Hobert's pop success is more than a lucky strike

By FRANCESCA BERMUDEZ
Los Angeles Times (TNS)

LOS ANGELES — Audrey Hobert isn't clowning herself anymore. She was meant to be a pop star.

"I had been sitting on all of this music long enough that there was like a tiny man in my soul beating down the door of my soul," Hobert, 26, said on a recent rainy morning at Swingers Diner in Hollywood.

Last week, the L.A. native set out on her Staircase to Stardom tour across North America, Europe and Australia. Intimate venues will see her perform from her debut album, "Who's the Clown?," released via RCA Records in August.

Though the "Bowling alley" singer has "so immensely" enjoyed her whirlwind year, music wasn't always in the cards. After graduating from New York University with a BFA in screenwriting in 2021, she fell into place behind the scenes, working in a Nickelodeon writers' room for the since-canceled "The Really Loud House."

Everything changed when she started penning tracks with childhood friend Gracie Abrams for the 2024 album "The Secret of Us." Hobert signed a publishing deal with Universal Music Group soon after and participated in songwriter sessions for a few months before setting her sights on something more personal. Initially writing for herself, it became clear her confessional lyrics couldn't be confined to her bedroom walls.

She teamed up with producer Ricky Gourmet to pin down the perfect level of bubblegum pop and determine when a song was in need of a good saxophone solo. Despite never being cast in a lead role during her "theater kid" tenure, Hobert's music exudes main character energy. The first single she put out, "Sue me," a high-voltage pop anthem about hooking up with an ex if only to feel wanted for a glimmer in time, reached No. 26 on Billboard's Pop Airplay Chart. The music video accompanying the release – directed by Hobert, as all her videos are – introduced listeners to an artist not afraid to dance like nobody's watching.

Even though she's performed only a handful of shows, she already has a dedicated fan base at the ready to belt her most self-aware lyrics at her high-profile live shows – whether that be an expletive-laced chorus in "Sue me" or a line about a forgotten pizza pocket in " Sex and the city."

Over French toast and black coffee, Hobert mused about the career she never saw coming.

[This conversation has been lightly edited for length and clarity.]

Q: As someone who likes to be at home in her creams and nightgown, how have you adapted to the life of an up-and-coming pop star?

A: I just still feel like a girl who likes to be in her creams and nightgown, and I also, in addition to that, really enjoy the feeling of working and sort of running on fumes. I think if you like that feeling too much, it dips into dangerous territory a little bit, but it doesn't … feel much like partying. For instance, I've been shooting a music video for the past four days, and last night I was up until 3 in the morning with what we were referring to as the skeleton crew. It feels like I'm not even almost entirely there yet, and I will innately know, "Oh my God, I've arrived." But you can sort of protect yourself from it if that's what you want.

Q: In your song "Phoebe," you open with, "I went to New York / 'Cause a man in a suit told me / You're gonna be a star." From a listener standpoint, it felt like " Sue me " dropped and everything took off. Can you tell me more about the process of writing and pitching?

A: I had just discovered that I like to write songs. It was simply that, and it was like a pastime. I had written all these songs with Gracie and signed a publishing deal as a result, and was sort of in this limbo of … I was a child who knew exactly what she wanted to do, and now I'm an adult and am technically a signed songwriter, but I have not spent any of my life wanting to be a songwriter, so I can't imagine that this is the way my life is going to suddenly go, that I'm going to launch myself into a career that I haven't wanted my whole life in the same way I wanted to be a television writer.

But at the same time, the way that it all unfolded felt so cosmic and I knew that songwriting felt very interesting. So as it all unfolded, I just never, for a second, questioned it or let myself feel even a stitch of imposter syndrome because I knew better. I knew that to hold myself back from whatever this journey was going to be would be me doing myself a huge disservice.

Gracie and I were living together at the time, and that was kind of in the thick of her intense touring. So she was gone. I was living on the Westside of L.A., which is not a very young area, and found myself sort of feeling like I was this Rapunzel type, living in this cement townhouse and very isolated. And I just started writing songs, and I found that it was like a third dimension, sort of "Twilight Zone"-style, that I could go to and exit my body entirely. Forget that I was maybe feeling a little bit lonely, forget that I missed my best friend, forget that I wanted a boyfriend and didn't have one, and just write.

There's nothing as mystical as songwriting to me, because it's two kinds of writing – melodic writing that is completely unexplainable, and then lyrics, that is sort of the best puzzle. It's like math, which I'm actually very bad at, but I can see a sentiment come together in my head before it actually does. It was just eight months basically of manic writing. And during that time is when I … told Universal Music Publishing, "I think I want to try an artist project." It was sort of a way to get out of doing songwriting sessions, and then [I] met Ricky and knew that I didn't want to spend all day, every day, making something with anybody else. It was just the purest, most greatest fun of my young life.

Q: You said you woke up one day with the title of the album and the cover art, and you thought it was strange at first. Have you gained any more clarity on what that means?

A: I know that the cover specifically was born out of me sort of assuming that I would put this project together by myself. I just never considered that a label might get involved. And I thought, as a new artist, I'm going to have to intrigue people with the cover of this project, whatever it is. And I just felt like a white girl making pop music hasn't done horrifying imagery. I just [wanted] to scare someone and to make someone go, "What kind of music is this?" And then you find out it's just pop. That was the intention.

Q: Take me to the release of " Sue me." What was that moment like?

A: The date of the release got pushed back a few times, and every time it got pushed back, my heart broke a little bit. I just couldn't wait. I was more eager than I'd ever been to do anything … and the second I put one song out, I felt just way more free.

In terms of the response to it, you just never know. You could have a great song and do everything right, and it just doesn't work. It's not like "Sue me" is a "Million Dollar Baby," Tommy Richman -style viral hit, but it did catch fire and that felt great. Also, I had probably, by the time that "Sue me" came out, listened to it upwards of 800 times. So I wasn't like, "People like the song." I was like, "I love this song."

Q: How was the transition to writing songs about your own life?

A: It just didn't feel like it was an active switch. Writing with Gracie was the same kind of bliss as it feels to write by myself, but it's sweeter in a different way. It feels good in a different way because it's totally shared. And one of my greatest joys in life is sharing in something with her. It always has been since I've known her, since we were kids. We never planned or thought we would collaborate in a greater way, because it felt like hanging out was a creative collaboration; I can't really describe it. When I started writing by myself, it's a bit more grueling, but then it's the same sort of drug-like rush that you get when you feel like you've written a good line.

Q: Your sound feels very nostalgic to me, but then there are lyrics like those in "Thirst Trap" that could only be from this digital era. You've said you didn't have any direct references for this project, but are there any artists who have influenced your approach to songwriting?

A: I think that could become true for my next album, but I felt like I didn't know the rules of songwriting. I always would listen to pop music and … was always asking myself, "Why is this the best song ever? Oh, it's because this, this, this." But when I wrote these songs, I remember having the active thought early on of, "There are no rules." I have far too much of a slant, and it was so fresh and new that I have artists who I look up to in terms of songwriting, but it came all just from deep within me. I remember truly having the thought of, "I don't know if this is classic, typical structure, I just know that this is what is keeping me interested. So I'm gonna just go with it."

Q: Your music videos are amazing. Is there a dream director you'd like to work with or do you want to direct every Audrey Hobert music video?

A: If you had asked me when I was going out to labels and pitching myself as an artist, I would have said I'd never work with a director. But the more I do them, obviously, the more I love to direct, but also the more that I would feel interested in being directed. I really, really like this guy Dan Streit, and we actually are using his camera for the music video that we just finished shooting. I just think he's super cool, and he's the only guy that I've ever been like, "Huh, I wonder if he'd ever direct one of my videos."

Q: Your video for "Thirst Trap" was inspired by the Japanese horror film "House." You also reference "High School Musical 2." What's your taste in movies like? Do you have any comfort watches?

A: I'm just really into seeing movies all the time. I've been practicing keeping the social media apps off my phone and just tuning in to something. I had never seen a Robert Altman movie, and I just watched "The Player," and I really enjoyed that. And comfort watches … "Frances Ha," "Mistress America." I just named two Greta Gerwigs, but I just love her as an actress. I mean, I love her as a director, but I really love her as an actress. And "House" was something that I just stumbled upon and then watched twice in a row. I love it. I feel like my taste is pretty eclectic.

Q: Is fashion an important part of your artistic vision?

A: If you had asked me in fourth grade what I wanted to be when I grew up, I would probably say "fashion designer." I always felt inspired by the clothes on the Disney Channel. I am interested, I do like it, but in order for me to feel comfortable going about the beginnings of this pop-star life, I need to be dressed in my own clothes or else I freak out. I just did a shoot for Vevo and I wore my own clothes, didn't really spend much time on my appearance. I remember seeing the photos and being like, "Sometimes it's worth it to just put in a little bit more of an effort, girl." But that being said, I need to feel like myself.

Q: Who was your Disney Channel fashion inspiration?

A: Selena Gomez. All the way.

Q: Have you been writing more or are you taking a breather now that the album is out?

A: I've been thinking a lot about writer's block and the concept of it, and I don't know if it's real, but the conclusion I've come to is I don't have to worry about if I'm a writer or not, because I've felt like a writer my entire life. Some people swear by writing a song every day and finishing it, even if it's bad. Some people take four years off from writing at all. How I feel this morning is when I have a song to write, I know I'm gonna write it. I try not to waste my time worrying about why I'm not writing all the time in the way I was when I wrote the album. And so I guess to answer the question, not really.

Q: What's been the most rewarding part of this experience? Does it all go back to [opening track] " I like to touch people "?

A: That's very astute. Yeah, it's the most exciting part of all of this. It is more exciting than the flashing lights of the L.A. Times photographer at Swingers Diner and it's more exciting than someone who I respect following me on Instagram, and it reminds me why I'm doing it all. It's the coolest thing of all time.

BOOKS

Kate Baer wrote her poems ‘with you in mind’

By ERICA PEARSON
The Minnesota Star Tribune (TNS)

Harper / TNS

Kate Baer tries her best not to give people advice.

But the bestselling poet and author of the new collection “How About Now” does want to share some of what she’s been reminding herself lately.

“I think most of us, when we get into our 40s, we’ve lived enough life to know that we’re so lucky to age and that there’s a lot of people who don’t get that privilege. We don’t get a dress rehearsal for this life. It’s like, this is it,” Baer said. “Whatever you want to do, it’s time to do it now.”

Baer, who lives in rural Pennsylvania with her husband and four kids, knew she wanted to be a writer when she was 8 years old. With her 2020 debut “What Kind of Woman,” her first work of paid writing, she landed atop the New York Times bestseller list for paperback trade fiction.

Baer talked with the Minnesota Star Tribune about her new book and the precocious midlife crisis she weathered while writing it.

This conversation has been edited for space and clarity.

Q: Can we start by talking about the very end of your new book, because I love the dedication: “To anyone holding this collection in your hands wondering if there’s enough time for you: I wrote this with you in mind. You’re still here. It’s not too late. How about now?”

A: I’ve always been a late bloomer, but for the first time in my life, I was kind of ahead of the game with a midlife crisis. At the very green age of 39, it started with multiple health crises. I had a pelvic floor prolapse, and then I was referred to an ALS clinic for an influx of just crazy neurological symptoms that no one could explain. I ultimately did not have that… Basically, I was really facing my own mortality. And so, I guess, with that came this uncomfortable, but ultimately freeing, reminder that there’s only, like, one life. So, I mean, “How about now?”

Q: Reading this collection, you can tell you’re going through a lot.

A: I also had this intense need for life to slow down. I felt like entire seasons were passing me by in what felt like weeks. Like it’s Christmas, and now we’re swimming. My role as a mother was also changing … I have four kids, so I was wearing that young mommy hat for so long, and now my kids are in puberty and asking me to stay out of their hair. I just felt like so many things were happening that I wasn’t just on the path to a nervous breakdown. I was, like, at the finish line.

Q: So many of these poems are intensely personal. But then at the same time, they tap into this universal feeling of being a middle-aged woman in today’s world, where I know readers will be like, “I need to send this poem to my entire group chat right now.”

A: It’s not like I have that intention: “Now I’m going to write a poem that’s for everyone. Now I’m going to share a story about my life.” I’m glad that that’s come together like that, but I wouldn’t say that’s super intentional. But I always hope that whatever I’m writing about connects with somebody else as well.

Q: My own favorite poem in this collection, and maybe it’s because I ask people questions for a living, is “Interview with a Male Moderator at a Decorated Literary Event,” which begins with the question, “Do you ever feel that men might feel alienated from your work?” and the reply, “Do you ever feel that men are missing out on the richest parts of humanity?”

A: I have found myself in the position of answering the question that’s basically like, “How can you make this for everyone?” from a man so many times, that that’s where that poem came from. There are times where I have felt belittled by questions, like “It’s so cute you have this hobby” kind of questions or, especially from men, like, “This is so nice for your little emotions that you could talk about with your girlfriends.” And I’m just like, “But babe, I feel sorry for you. You’re the one who’s missing out.”

I have three boys. I’m married to a man. I try my hardest to help them as much as I can. But, you know, I chaperoned an eighth grade field trip last year for my son, and when we got to lunch, there was a huge difference between how the girls sat for lunch and how the boys sat for lunch. And I felt sick about it. I was like, “Thank God, I’m a girl. But like, look, boys, you can also sit in a circle and talk, right?”

Q: What is it like to be a bestselling poet living where you do, in rural Lancaster County?

A: I’m only a train ride from New York and Philadelphia, and I’m in the part of Pennsylvania that’s, like, close to things like the beach and cities. It’s very nice to go outside and no one can see me. I usually love it in a lot of ways. It also can be very isolating. I definitely live in a conservative area and because my voice is not, it is awkward, because I’m also a person living in a community, going to PTO events and going to soccer sidelines. And I try to keep my lives separate, and I also try to keep my brain and my mind open and do a lot of listening and not get up on my soap box and just try to connect with people in my community. But it is hard…

It’s very peaceful where I live in some ways, and then in other ways, it does not feel very peaceful. But then it’s like, what am I projecting? There’s this virtual world we live in, and then there’s the real world. And it’s very hard not to conflate the two.

Q: How is this collection different from your past work?

A: I think with every book, it’s like a little chapter of my life, a little sliver. I could easily see, in any book I’ve written, to page through and be like, “Oh yeah, I was still breastfeeding.” Or like, “Well, yeah, this is when parts of my body went numb, and I didn’t know why.” So I mean, for sure, it’s hard. I’m still kind of close to it, but I think it’s very reflective. My books are very personal. They all are timestamps for me, for sure.

Q: Is there a poem in this collection that is like, the most precious to you?

A: I do have some favorites. There’s a poem called “You Used to Text Me for Nudes but Now It’s Just for Information for Our Taxes.” And there’s a line at the end of that poem that says, “Lift your mouth to the horn and call me back to you.” I really write by ear. And so that just like, kind of like when you hear a chord in a song, it felt so good. That felt so right to me. And so that poem is my favorite, not really because of the whole poem, but because of those last two lines.

I felt such a feeling of pride when I wrote that, and I was like, “Oh, that’s the good part of this.” There’s so little payoff in writing. I’ve written entire novels and thrown them out. There’s so few times that I’ve gotten that feeling and so many poems that are hard, going back and editing and editing and editing, and taking out commas, and trying to find a better word. So when that happens, I really don’t forget.

BESTSELLERS

Here are the bestsellers for the week that ended Saturday, Nov. 29, compiled from data from independent and chain bookstores, book wholesalers and independent distributors nationwide, powered by Circana BookScan.

HARDCOVER FICTION

1. The Widow. John Grisham. Doubleday
2. Alchemised. SenLinYu. Del Rey
3. The Secret of Secrets. Dan Brown. Doubleday
4. Brimstone (deluxe ed.). Callie Hart. Forever
5. Gone Before Goodbye. Witherspoon/Coben. Grand Central
6. The Book of Azrael (deluxe ed.). Amber V. Nicole. Kensington
7. Quicksilver (deluxe ed.). Callie Hart. Forever
8. The Intruder. Freida McFadden. Poisoned Pen
9. Return of the Spider. James Patterson. Little, Brown
10. Always Remember. Charlie Mackesy. Penguin Life

HARDCOVER NONFICTION

1. The Let Them Theory. Mel Robbins. Hay House
2. The Pioneer Woman Cooks: The Essential Recipes. Ree Drummond. Morrow
3. The Miracles Among Us. Marc Siegel. Harper Influence
4. Guinness World Records 2026. Guinness World Records
5. How to Test Negative for Stupid. John Kennedy. Broadside
6. 1929. Andrew Ross Sorkin. Viking
7. The Look. Michelle Obama. Crown
8. Nobody’s Girl. Virginia Roberts Giuffre. Knopf
9. The American Revolution. Ward/Burns. Knopf
10. Puzzle Mania! Joel Fagliano. Authors Equity

TRADE PAPERBACK

1. The 2026 Old Farmer’s Almanac. Old Farmer’s Almanac
2. Murder at Holly House. Denzil Meyrick. Poisoned Pen
3. Merry Murdle. G.T. Karber. Griffin
4. The God of the Woods. Liz Moore. Riverhead
5. Good Spirits. B.K. Borison. Avon
6. Merry Christmas, You Filthy Animal. Meghan Quinn. Bloom
7. Housemaid. Freida McFadden. Grand Central
8. Quicksilver. Callie Hart. Forever
9. The Right Move. Liz Tomforde. Amara
10. Mate. Ali Hazelwood. Berkley

Reprinted from Publishers Weekly.

REVIEW

A dog who likes poetry and James Audubon appear in ‘Pelican Child’

By CORY OLDWEILER
The Minnesota Star Tribune (TNS)

Knopf / TNS

The singular, disconcerting uneasiness that is so characteristic of Joy Williams’ fiction, yet so hard to pin down, is once again dazzlingly on display in her latest collection, “The Pelican Child.”

The critically beloved author’s first book of full-length stories since 2015’s “ The Visiting Privilege ” contains a dozen works, all of which were published in journals, magazines and anthologies over the past 15 years. Trying to distill their subject matter yields plot descriptions that read a bit like Mad Libs.

In “The Fellow,” a caretaker at an artist’s retreat converses with a guest’s poetry-reading dog after a flood. Dismayed by the future of the Great Barrier Reef, a daycare owner in “My First Car” hires a stranger off the street to watch the center’s babies for a week while she prays for humanity. And in “After the Haiku Period,” twin 60-something heiresses storm a slaughterhouse to make a statement about their late father’s capitalist greed.

But Williams doesn’t rely solely on intriguing set pieces to envelop her readers. A detail from her prose can stop you in your tracks, as when a testy discussion about inheritance in “The Beach House” suddenly gives way to two friends talking about whether Ted Kaczynski had a deck of tarot cards in prison.

Or when the protagonist of “Stuff” reacts to his terminal cancer diagnosis by lamenting that “only last year, he had been on the cover of the telephone directory.” And sometimes you have to pause simply to ponder the insightful beauty of what is being observed, as when the narrator of “Flour” remarks that “Dusk is not nearly as considerate as is generally assumed.”

Williams isn’t chasing shock value, however, but offering subtle yet pointed assessments of our society. This commentary can be as casual as the fact that the daycare center is located “on a frontage road between a mattress wholesaler and a knife outlet.” Or it can be explicit, as in “Baba Iaga & the Pelican Child,” which provides a moral to its fairy tale encounter between John James Audubon and Slavic folklore, stating that “the birds and beasts of the world…should be valued for their bright and beautiful and mysterious selves and not willfully harmed.”

Death and loss feature prominently in these stories, which include several characters seemingly trapped in a metaphorical or metaphysical purgatory. Willie conjures up visits with his late father in “Nettle,” perhaps hoping to atone for the role he played in his father’s death.

Jane Click, who is consumed by grief over the death of her two children in “Chaunt,” retreats to the Dove, a building housing “decent enough individuals caught by the mishaps of time in a circumstance of continual, bearable punishment.” And in “Chicken Hill,” a woman named Ruth tries to suss out a mystery from her childhood by conversing with a girl who might actually be her younger self.

One of the last things that child tells Ruth is that “Imagination only fails us in the end, when the stories we tell ourselves have to stop.” Three of the stories in “The Pelican Child” date from after the start of the pandemic, a period when Williams also published the novel “ Harrow.”

Though now in her 80s, Williams’ imagination clearly hasn’t failed, so hopefully her remarkable stories will keep coming.

Lauren Graham and Amy Sherman-Palladino to release ‘Gilmore Girls’ book in 2027

By HILLEL ITALIE
AP National Writer

NEW YORK — After years of advice books, children’s books and cookbooks inspired by “Gilmore Girls,” an upcoming work promises a more personal take on the beloved series. The co-writers are “Gilmore Girls” creator Amy Sherman-Palladino and star Lauren Graham.

Celadon Books, a division of Macmillan Publishers, announced that the book was scheduled for the fall of 2027. Graham and Sherman-Palladino will offer “sharp wit, personal reflection, and never-before-shared stories” as they reflect on the dramedy set in fictional Stars Hollow, Connecticut, featuring Graham as single mother Lorelai Gilmore and Alexis Bledel as her studious daughter Rory.

The book is currently untitled.

“I’m thrilled to collaborate with Amy to bring readers all our stories of the special years we spent filming Gilmore Girls, the first and second time!” Graham said in a statement.

AUTOMOTIVE

AUTO REVIEWS

Hot EV match-up, Cadillac Lyriq-V vs. Tesla Model 3 Performance

By HENRY PAYNE
The Detroit News (TNS)

The midsize Cadillac Lyriq SUV and compact Tesla Model 3 sedan are brand icons. The Lyriq redefined Caddy as an EV maker, the Model 3 made Tesla a best-seller.

Their performance trims – the 2026, $80K Lyriq-V and 2025, $56K Model 3 Performance – represent the state-of-the-art of two U.S. brands that are on the industry's bleeding edge of modern digital electric tech.

You read that right: the bleeding edge.

After decades of playing catch-up to European luxury brands, America boasts two models at the forefront of the premium market's electric, autonomous trends. The Yanks come at the equation from different perspectives, but, as road trips from Oakland County to Charlevoix, Michigan, indicate, they arrive at the destination in a very similar manner. Here's how they compare.

Hands-free driving

Tesla has been the lead stagecoach on the Wild West frontier of autonomous driving, and it continues to push the envelope. The Model 3 would have happily driven itself (its camera trained on me to make sure I was a good chaperone) from door to door on my 250-mile journey.

"Navigate to Charlevoix, Michigan," I barked, and we were off. The Tesla exited my cul-de-sac, navigated a Telegraph Road Michigan turn, then accelerated up to speed onto I-75 North.

Since Full Self-Driving (FSD) became widely available to Tesla customers in 2022, it's impressive how far the software has come in a short time. I used to put a "STUDENT DRIVER" sticker on the back of my car, so inconsistent was its habits. Like a 16-year-old novice, it would ghost brake on four lanes, edge out into traffic at Michigan turns, sometimes miss a red light.

No more. FSD has become more predictable. It has adapted sophisticated, human-like driving habits like: 1) slowing down in sight of slowed traffic rather than running up on it, and 2) executing right-on-red turns.

Cadillac's Super Cruise actually beat Tesla to hands-free driving (both now go hands-free with camera surveillance) but has generally been more conservative, emphasizing passenger comfort. The Lyriq waited until I was on I-75 to go hands-free, then displayed a green light at the top of the steering wheel so I knew it was engaged. A blinking red light – complemented by a buzz to the seat – indicated when it was concerned my attention had wandered from the road (the Tesla's self-driving avatar is a small blue steering wheel in the screen).

Both Caddy and Tesla changed lanes to pass cars – but Lyriq was much less likely to be a left-lane hog, courteously returning to the right lane after completing a pass. Off divided highways, Super Cruise is increasingly available on secondary roads. On M-31 heading into Petoskey, for example, the Cadillac remained hands-free until giving up at intersections like the light at Bay Harbor resort.

The Tesla, by contrast, continued confidently on its way.

Driving dynamics

Hands-free driving is sci-fi stuff, but I still love to drive.

Twisted, two-lane M-32 between I-75 and Charlevoix is one of the best driver's roads in Michigan, and I put the hammer down in both EVs. ZOT!

At just 4,054 pounds, the Tesla came off corners like a rocket ship, delivering 100 percent of its 554 pound-feet of torque to all four wheels. At a porky 5,980 pounds, the Lyriq's girth is evident (as with its compact 5,192-pound Optiq stablemate). But so is Cadillac's competition-bred performance engineering. Downhill into a group of M-32 esses, the Model 3's Brembo brakes seem ill-equipped to stop the rocket, unlike the Caddy's firmer shoes. Even more noticeable is the Lyriq's confidence on corner turn-in. The Model 3 feels less certain, like a doe trying out its new legs. Tesla has work to do.

Charging

Tesla's integrated charging network is the brand's secret sauce, and it continues to impress.

Navigation not only charted my course to Charlevoix, but told me I would need to charge in Gaylord for five minutes to arrive with 7 percent of charge. Just 7 percent of charge?

"Set arrival energy," read the Tesla display so I could target whatever percentage I wanted (I like 25 percent) so I have enough juice to do stuff when I arrive at my destination rather than hunting for another charger. Dependent on a third-party charging network, the Cadillac can't offer this feature, nor can it guarantee charger destinations will, um, work.

The Lyriq-V initially charted my course to Charlevoix with zero charging stops – but once on the road adjusted that prediction and routed me to Bay City's Electrify America charger. Right next to the Tesla chargers. Both chargers were busy, and with eight stalls – twice the EA number – Teslas didn't have to wait as long.

GM has access to Tesla chargers, but not to the rival's older, so-called, V2 chargers found in Bay City. Cost? The Tesla chargers averaged 36-39 cents per kWh – the EA chargers 56 cents.

On multiple trips, Model 3 – likely due to its improved drag coefficient of 0.22 (the Lyriq is still an impressive 0.28) – also seemed more efficient at high speeds. At 80 mph, the Tesla only lost 5 percent of range. The Caddy? About 35 percent.

For perspective, Tesla energy cost is comparable to a BMW M340i X-Drive at $4 a gallon premium gas, while Lyriq would cost about 25 percent more.

Design

It's remarkable that the Lyriq-V's drag coefficient is as good as it is. The brand has leaned into its storied design history with its boldest looks since the 1960s. The Lyriq (and other Caddy EVs) have swagger.

If the Tesla is a soap bar built for speed, the Caddy is a rolling Fox marquee sign built to get noticed.

That premium look extends to the interior, where the Lyriq is lathered in luxury, including 33-inch screen that sprawls across a dashboard peppered with jewel-like air vents and a center console anchored by a bling-tastic rotary screen controller. The Tesla? It's so smartphone simple that everything is run through the center 15.4-inch screen. Even the air vents. A rotary controller? Fuhgettaboutit.

So luxurious is the Lyriq's wardrobe (and those of (and sister Optiq, Vistiq and Escalade IQ) that Cadillac doesn't consider Tesla a competitor and claims it is the best-selling premium EV brand. That's silly given Tesla's similar price points and market share.

But it does speak to how differently these two brands have approached the EV space. For Tesla, the Model 3 ushered in a complete reimagining of the auto industry from performance to autonomy to design. Its owners aren't just drivers, they are guinea pigs in the experiment.

For Cadillac, on the other hand, EVs are a chance to recast itself as luxury leader. Just as Cadillac defined luxury in the early 20th century, so does Lyriq & Co. intend to establish a new standard of the world in autonomy and interior comfort.

Are you a pioneer with a taste for adventure or an arbiter of fine things? The difference may decide whether you drive Tesla or Cadillac.

Henry Payne is auto critic for The Detroit News.

Henry Payne / The Detroit News / TNS

2026 Cadillac Lyriq-V

★★★

Vehicle type: Battery-powered, all-wheel-drive, five-passenger SUV

Price: $80,090, including $1,395 destination fee ($85,785 Premium as tested)

Powerplant: 102 kWh lithium-ion battery with single rear or dual electric-motor drive

Power: 615 horsepower, 650 pound-feet torque

Transmission: Single-speed direct drive

Performance: 0-60 mph, 3.3 seconds (Car and Driver); top speed, 131 mph; towing, 3,500 pounds

Weight: 5,980 pounds

Range: 285 miles on full charge

Report card

Highs: Cadillac presence; confident handling

Lows: Porky; third-party charger dependency

2025 Tesla Model 3 Performance

★★★★

Vehicle type: All-wheel drive, five-passenger sedan

Price: Base $56,630, including $1,390 destination charge ($64,630 as tested)

Powerplant: Lithium-ion battery pack mated to dual electric motors

Power: 510 horsepower, 554 pound-feet torque

Transmission: Single-speed automatic

Performance: 0-60 mph, 2.8 seconds (Car and Driver); top speed, 155 mph

Weight: 4,054 pounds

Range: 298 miles on full charge

Report card

Highs: Autonomy leader; confident charging experience

Lows: Numb handling; questionable steering wheel ergonomics

2026 Nissan Leaf EV appeals to Americans' love of beige

By LARRY PRINTZ
Tribune News Service (TNS)

Once upon a time, Detroit built cars that carried astronauts in ticker-tape parades and made teenage boys spray Aqua Net on their mullets. Sporting raucous and raw big-block V-8s, they were chrome-trimmed testaments to optimism. Meanwhile, Italy gave us Ferraris, red midlife crises that sounded like 12-cylinder angels. Germany engineered the Porsche 911, proof that you can mix math, beer and speed. And now, in 2026, Japan gifts us the Nissan Leaf, an electric commuter pod that looks like a platypus.

OK, maybe that's unfair. Three inches shorter than the 2025 model, the Leaf looks much like a Nissan Ariya EV that's been left in the dryer too long. And there's some truth to that, given they share the same electric vehicle architecture. But park it next to a Ford Mustang or a Mustang Mach-E and the Leaf looks like the designated driver who showed up in orthopedic shoes. For the utterly sensible, it's the kind of car you buy when you're too mature for fun.

Offered in ascending S, S+, SV+ and Platinum trims, all but the base S trim get a 75-kWh battery pack and a single 160-kW AC electric motor generating 214 horsepower. Front-wheel drive is standard, all-wheel drive is not available. Range depends on trim level, with the S+ offering 303 miles, the SV+ 288 miles and the Platinum+ 259 miles. The S trim has a smaller 130-kW AC motor and 52-kWh battery generate 174 horsepower. Its range has not been finalized by the EPA.

The powertrain proves to be buttery smooth. The cabin is whisper-quiet. The steering is nicely weighted and responsive. The 2026 Nissan Leaf zips around town, darting through traffic like a squirrel on meth. But take a corner with any level of enthusiasm and the Leaf immediately files an HR complaint. There's understeer. There's body lean. Push it like a Nissan Z and you'll produce enough tire squeal that pedestrians will assume you're starring in a community-theater production of "The Fast and the Furious." The suspension is compliant enough, and it handles long, gentle sweepers with a blissful confidence. This is a commuter pod, one that's impressively pleasant, refined and about as thrilling as a non-alcoholic beer at a PTA fundraiser.

Like many electric vehicles, the Leaf has adjustable regenerative braking, which captures energy produced while braking to help slow the vehicle and recharge the battery pack. But unlike many EVs, it's not strong enough to provide one-pedal driving, something American drivers like, but Japanese drivers don't. Guess who's prioritized? Hint: not their biggest market.

Nissan's top-trim Platinum Plus wears a sticker price around $42,000, and the interior does a marvelous job of making you wonder where exactly that money went. The plastics' sheen are hard enough to survive a nuclear winter. Nothing offends, but nothing delights either. It's a minimalist aesthetic, to be sure. While the Leaf's MSRP ensures a long list of features, none of it feels special, and not one element triggers any joy. This includes the infotainment interface, which appears new, but retains ancient graphics deep in its menu that are at least 15 years old.

But give Nissan's designers credit: the front seats are fantastic. Cushy without being mushy, bolstered without judgment, and spacious thanks to a center console that doesn't intrude on knee space. Nissan even left an open area ahead of the console, which creates a sense of airiness. Consider it an automotive sunroom. The back seat, on the other hand, is designed for people you don't like very much. Adults can sit back there if they've done something to deserve it. Cargo space is adequate in the way that a dorm mini-fridge is adequate. There's no frunk and little rear under-floor storage.

As it turns out, the 2026 Nissan Leaf works best as a second or third car, the one that handles errands, school runs, and the urban slog. And that's surprising. After 15 years on the EV scene, the Nissan Leaf should be leading the pack. Instead, it's struggling to keep up with newer, fresher, more ambitious competitors. There's no technological leap, no innovation that proves Nissan has been doing this longer than nearly everyone. The 2026 Nissan Leaf has simply been brought up to the level of the current market, but not to the front of it.

At $42,000, rivals offer more range, more performance, more swagger, more frunk, more fun. By comparison, the 2026 Nissan Leaf is the beige cardigan of cars. No, it isn't bad. It's pleasant, smooth, likeable, practical enough and humble. Yet in today's EV world, humility is a tough way to win. Still, when future archaeologists dig it up, they'll realize that this is what happens when people let their appliances unionize.

Larry Printz is an automotive journalist based in South Florida.

Nissan / TNS

2026 Nissan Leaf

Base price: $31,485

Powertrain: 160-kW AC synchronous electric motor

Horsepower/torque: 214/261 pound-feet

Battery: 75 kWh

EPA range: 259-303 miles

Recharge time (DC fast charger, 10-80%): 35 minutes

Length/Width/Height: 173/71/61 inches

Ground clearance: 5.3 inches

Cargo capacity: 20-55 cubic feet

Towing capacity: Not rated

TECHNOLOGY

TECH REVIEW

Portable power gift guide 2025

By JIM ROSSMAN
Tribune News Service (TNS)

Jackery Explorer 1000 v2 power station.
Jackery / TNS

Everyone needs a plan for when the power goes out.

Portable power stations can help you keep the lights on and the coffee brewed in an emergency.

My mom lives outside Houston, and when there's a hurricane in the Gulf, she wheels out her power station and plugs in her lamp and coffee maker and her weather radio.

Here are three power stations of varying sizes that can help you make it through the next power outage or camping trip.

Jackery Explorer 1000 v2

This is a very portable yet powerful power station.

Weighing in at just 23.8 pounds, the Explorer 1000 v2 uses LiFePO4 batteries that are rated to hold more than 70 percent of their power after 4,000 recharge cycles. This means you can charge up and use it daily for more than 10 years and it'll still keep the power flowing.

It has USB-A and USB-C ports to keep your phone and other gadgets charged up, along with three AC outlets to power your appliances and lamps. There's also a 12-volt/10amp accessory port to power things like portable refrigerators.

Anker Solix C2000 Gen 2 power station.
Anker / TNS

The batteries have 1,070 watt-hours of power and the AC inverter can provide up to 1,500W of electricity, so you can power a full-size refrigerator for up to 12 hours or heat up dinner in a 1,200W microwave.

It can charge from a wall outlet in just 1.7 hours or from a pair of 200W solar panels in just 3.8 hours. There's also an emergency super charge mode that'll give you 100 percent charge in just 1 hour.

It has a folding handle and is very easy to carry around or toss in the trunk for a campout.

There's a color screen showing all the input and output activity and it can also act as a uninterrupted power supply with a response time of less than 20 milliseconds.

It can also be controlled by an app on your smartphone.

Full retail price is $799, but at the time of writing it was priced less than $500 from jackery.com. Sales happen pretty frequently.

Ecoflow Trail Series 300 DC

This is a really small and light power station with the form factor of a camping lantern, including a woven carrying strap.

Weighing in at just 5.69 pounds, the Trail 300 DC has a 288 watt-hour LiFePo4 battery with a 300W DC output.

The DC in the name means this power station only provides DC power. It doesn't have an AC inverter and can't power things like a coffee maker.

What it does have is two 140W USB-C ports, one 12W USB-A port and one 12v/10amp DC accessory outlet.

It can recharge from USB-C, an XT-60 (110W) solar input or the 12v outlet.

Ecoflow says the Trail 300 DC can charge up your phone 16 times or a portable electric cooler for up to 23 hours.

This is a perfect power station to take on a day hike or an overnight camping trip.

It's easy to carry and can even handle an occasional drop.

The full retail price is $249, but Black Friday sales have the price down at $149 at ecoflow.com.

If you like the form factor, Ecoflow also has a Trail 200 DC with a slightly smaller battery, and they've announced the Trail Plus 300 DC, which includes more output ports and a LED lantern which will be available soon.

Ecoflow Trail Series 300 DC power station.
Ecoflow / TNS

Anker Solix C2000 Gen 2

Anker has updated it's C2000 Power Station to a Gen 2 model and as its name implies, it has a battery capacity of 2,048 Wh with LiFePo4 batteries rated for 4,000 cycles.

LiFEPO4 also means faster recharging. With AC and solar, it is capable of charging from zero to 100 percent in less than an hour.

From an 1,800W AC outlet, the C2000 Gen 2 can charge up in about 90 minutes. It can handle 800W of solar, needing three hours to charge up. You can combine those two recharge methods for the fastest charge.

Anker also sells a charger that connects to your vehicle's alternator for an 800W three-hour charge.

The C2000 Gen 2 has a 2,400W inverter to power almost everything, including a full-size refrigerator for 32 hours.

Outputs include five AC outlets, one TT-30 RV outlet and a 12V/10A accessory outlet. As for USB, it has two 140W PD Fast Charge USB-C, one 15W USB-C and one 12W USB-A port. Inputs include AC (1,800W) and XT-60 solar (800W).

The C2000 Gen 2 measures 18.1 inches × 9.8 inches × 10.1 inches and it weighs 41.67 pounds, which is pretty darn light for a power station of this capacity. It also has two carrying handles on top and it's flat, so you can stack things on it, like an expansion battery.

Yes, Anker sells a 2,048Wh expansion battery that can double the capacity of the system.

It also comes with Wi-Fi and Bluetooth and has an app to control it from anywhere. Its color LED screen lists all the information you'd need to monitor the unit's performance and charge levels.

Anker lists the C2000 Gen 2 for $1,499, but I found it on Anker's website for $739 just during Cyber Week (Dec. 2-Dec. 7).

Jim Rossman is a tech columnist for Tribune News Service. He may be reached at jrossmantechadviser@gmail.com.

Can you convert your old photos and negatives to digital at home?

By JIM ROSSMAN
Tribune News Service (TNS)

This week I heard from a reader, "I have a ton of old photos, negatives (both 35mm and medium format 120/220mm), 16mm movie film, slides, camcorder video and a few VHS cassettes that I need to convert to digital. I know there are phone apps that advertise their ability to quickly and easily convert all but movies and video, as well as services like Legacy Box who can do it all. I would love your recommendations."

There are different solutions for each type of media that needs converting. The easiest way is to send them off for converting to a company like Legacy Box or Capture.com.

These companies can handle all your media and if you'd rather just pay to have it done, this is the way to go. Pricing will vary depending on your quantity.

But if you'd like to try it at home, you can do it a lot cheaper (maybe free) and you may be surprised with the results.

For movies, the easiest way is to project the movies on a screen or wall and just set up your phone on some type of tripod to capture the image. This assumes you still have a working projector for your movies.

What's neat about this method is you can add an audio commentary. Copying the old family movies with your parents or grandparents on hand is great because they can help identify people and places in the scenes as you watch. Later generations will appreciate this.

Video tapes can also be copied with your phone's video camera if you can get the video to play on your TV. Setting up a dark room with no lights or windows will help minimize glare or reflections. Again, this assumes you still have a way to play the tapes on your TV.

What about old negatives or slides?

A negative scanner is the best way, but it will also cost some money.

Looking at Amazon for negative scanners, there are a lot in the $100-$200 range that can convert 35mm and smaller negatives.

If you have a ton of old negatives and slides you'd like to convert, a negative scanner could actually be cheaper than sending off hundreds or thousands of pictures to one of the big services.

Some flatbed scanners can also handle negatives.

Because the reader has both 35mm and larger format negatives to scan, they'd need a scanner that can handle each size. Usually, a scanner for larger negatives can also scan smaller sizes.

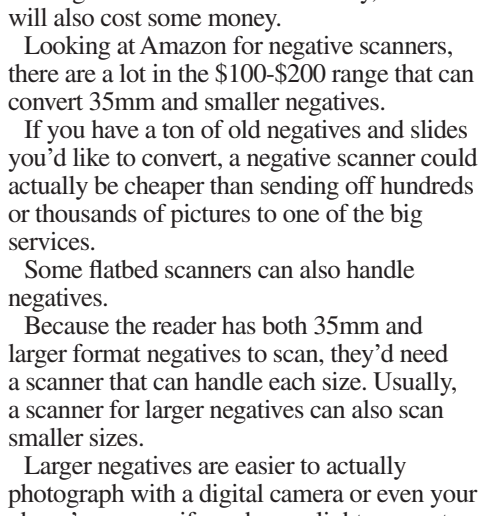
Larger negatives are easier to actually photograph with a digital camera or even your phone's camera, if you have a light source to light them up from behind. Amazon has inexpensive USB-powered light boxes to make this easier.

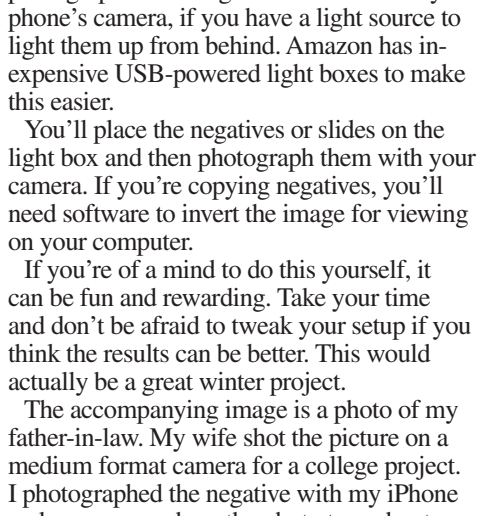
You'll place the negatives or slides on the light box and then photograph them with your camera. If you're copying negatives, you'll need software to invert the image for viewing on your computer.

If you're of a mind to do this yourself, it can be fun and rewarding. Take your time and don't be afraid to tweak your setup if you think the results can be better. This would actually be a great winter project.

The accompanying image is a photo of my father-in-law. My wife shot the picture on a medium format camera for a college project. I photographed the negative with my iPhone and you can see how the photo turned out after inverting the image in Photoshop.

Jim Rossman is a tech columnist for Tribune News Service. He may be reached at jrossmantechadviser@gmail.com.





Jim Rossman / TNS
A picture of Jim Rossman's father-in-law, taken by his wife during college.

GADGETS

Enbrighten / TNS

Enbrighten Eternity Landscape Lights.

Holiday lights offer simple setup for year-round festivity

By GREGG ELLMAN
Tribune News Service (TNS)

A recent post by Enbrighten told people to say goodbye to their boring outdoor holiday lighting, and honestly, that couldn't be more true.

Enbrighten Modern Cafe LED Lights bring your space to life with a stunning array of colors and lighting modes, perfect for every holiday and celebration. Built for year-round use, they feature weather-resistant, IP65-rated cables and durable acrylic bulbs. With a simple do-it-yourself setup, you'll enjoy an easy, permanent installation that looks great all year.

The setup is based on where you want the lights. Once it's completed, the Enbrighten companion app (available on Apple App Store and Google Play) is your best friend for lighting modes, colors, presets and dimming options. It walks you through connecting them to your home's existing 2.4GHz Wi-Fi network, and then the control is up to you. There's no right or wrong when there are millions of combinations to choose from.

The lights come with presets in the companion app for the most popular holidays and occasions: Christmas, the Fourth of July, Mardi Gras and more. If you don't see one to your liking, create your own custom setting in under a minute.

For Christmas lighting, as mentioned, there are presets, or you can create your own with your preferred colors and effects. Add to that, there's no need to attach the lights to a pesky timer. The app, which controls everything, has an option to create scenes for the time and days you want the lights on. My personal choice is dusk to dawn, which eliminates the need to change the time as the seasons and daylight hours change.

You can choose from 24-foot ($129.99) or 48-foot ($199.99) strands, or really be the talk of the neighborhood and go all out by connecting up to 750 feet of lights.

Lighting up your landscape for any holiday theme or year-round outdoor lighting is even easier with the **Enbrighten Eternity Landscape Lights**. These Wi-Fi-enabled LED puck lights make it easy to illuminate your landscaping with fully customizable colors and lighting programs.

Each compact light is mounted on a small tripod stake for quick installation; just plug the string into an AC outlet, connect it to your home Wi-Fi, and you're ready to go. The lights are rated IP67 weatherproof for dependable, year-round performance.

Available in 33-foot sets ($99.99), you can link multiple sets together with up to 150 feet total (36 lights) to cover larger areas with vibrant, programmable illumination.

https://enbrightenme.com/products/enbrighten-wifi-vibe-modern-color-changing-led-cafe-lights-12-bulbs-24ft-black-cord

https://enbrightenme.com/products/enbrighten-wifi-vibe-color-changing-eternity-landscape-lights-8-lights-33ft-black-cord

Enbrighten / TNS

Wi-Fi Color-Changing Modwern Cafe LED Lights.

Whether you're commuting, traveling or just relaxing, the pocket-sized **iFi GO Blu Air** improves your portable audio performance anywhere life takes you. And one of the best features is how easy the setup is, which dramatically enhances your sound quality from your smartphone or tablet to your wired headphones.

With Bluetooth 5.2, pairing is fast and reliable with your smartphone, tablet or other portable music sources. Then plug in wired headphones and immerse yourself in stunning high-resolution audio. Weighing only 1.09 ounces and measuring 2.11 by 1.33 by 0.77 inches, the GO Blu Air fits easily in your pocket or clips securely to your belt or backpack with the detachable magnetic clip.

My first experience with a portable amp like the iFi GO Blu Air left me genuinely impressed. At first glance, you might think it sounds too good to be true or that it's complicated to use, but it's not. In fact, it's as simple as plug-and-play. I tested it with several different headphones, and each showed a noticeable improvement in sound quality, even with basic audio files from my iPhone playlist, delivering hi-fi-quality audio.

According to the GO Blu Air specs, it supports a comprehensive suite of high-resolution codecs, including LDAC, LHDC, aptX (Classic, HD, Adaptive), AAC, and SBC. Inside is a 450 mAh lithium-polymer rechargeable battery (USB-C), which will supply power for up to 10 hours of use (depending on volume level and your headphones).

A ChronoDial controls the volume and playback. Give the dial a long press and you'll access smartphone voice assistants. There are MEMS microphones with Qualcomm's noise and echo suppression, which work perfectly for clear handsfree calls. The GO blu Air delivers up to 10 hours of uninterrupted, immersive sound on a single charge.

https://ifi-audio.com/products/go-blu-air
$129

iFi / TNS

iFi GO Blu Air.

ESR has recently added to its line of Apple-certified "Find My" enabled products with the **Geo Wallet** and the **Geo Wallet Stand**.

Both products are part of ESR's mission of "Tech Made Easier," designed to help users enjoy a more connected and worry-free digital life. With Apple's Find My technology built in, they can be located in seconds if lost, stolen or misplaced directly through the Find My app. The app displays their real-time location on a map, lets you play a sound to find them nearby, and even sends left-behind notifications so you're alerted if you accidentally leave them behind.

The Geo Wallet Stand combines sleek functionality with smart protection. It securely attaches to MagSafe-compatible iPhones with a powerful 3,200g magnetic lock. Inside, it can store up to 5 credit cards, held firmly in place by a dynamic tension spring for quick, easy removal. The wallet also includes RFID-blocking technology, which safeguards your cards from unauthorized wireless scanning or data theft.

While attached, the genuine leather wallet (3.9 by 2.5 by 0.66 inches) folds out into an adjustable stand for hands-free viewing in both portrait and landscape modes. You can keep it at any angle between 15 and 170 degrees. The battery is rated to last for 6 months before needing a charge. A finger loop is built into the outside for handsfree use.

It's available in black or gray for $39.99, blue for $41.99 and brown for $42.99.

The Geo Wallet ($39.99) looks and feels like a traditional wallet with added technology. According to ESR, it's the world's first ultra-slim wallet featuring a fully integrated, Apple-certified Find My tracker, so you can easily locate it using the Find My app.

Empty, it measures 4.5 by 3.5 by 0.6 inches and weighs 3 ounces. It holds up to 2 IDs, 15 bills and seven cards, and includes a coin pouch. It also has RFID-blocking technology.

https://www.esrtech.com/

ESR / TNS

ESR Wallet.

Contact Gregg Ellman at gregg ellman@mac.com. Follow him on Twitter @gregg ellman.

How AI is quietly reshaping your shopping trip

By CARSON HARTZOG
The Minnesota Star Tribune (TNS)

Leila Navidi / The Minnesota Star Tribune / TNS

Shoppers on Black Friday at Mall of America in Bloomington, Minnesota, on Nov. 28.

From the recommendations on a store's app to the prices flashing on digital shelf labels, artificial intelligence now shapes what shoppers see, what they buy and how products reach the shelves.

Until recently, most of it has happened behind the scenes. But retailers, including Target, are rolling out features that interact more directly with customers – a shift that could accelerate AI use and make the technology more visible.

"Every step of the way, from discovery to trial to purchase, whether it's online or in-store, AI is embedded into all of that," said Toopan Bagchi, managing director of Starship Advisors.

Gen AI and the supply chain

Before products reach shelves, retailers are already using machine learning to predict demand, plan shipments and reroute inventory.

But generative AI – today's technology buzzword – could take that a step further, said Dayton Steele, assistant professor of supply chain and operations at the University of Minnesota's Carlson School of Management.

Unlike machine learning, generative AI can pull from unstructured data such as videos, customer reviews and social media chatter. It also can track which items shoppers pick up and put back via sensors, potentially improving on-shelf availability at individual stores.

For now, Steele said, generative AI isn't capable of operating independently, likening it to a "B+ student that can do a lot of tasks at a B+ level."

He added that AI performs best with historical data, such as last year's weather or inventory trends, while humans can draw on context to respond to unexpected events, like the COVID-19 pandemic.

"In the next few years, we're going to see companies rapidly adopt AI to replace human workflows," Steele said. "And then you'll have shocks or disruptions where humans can respond in much more agile ways."

A personalized shopping experience

AI powers the product descriptions, review summaries and recommendations that appear on retailers' apps – and it's poised to change how people purchase items.

Several retailers have announced partnerships with OpenAI that enable shoppers to purchase items directly through ChatGPT.

Target said it will be one of the first major retailers to allow multiple items to be purchased in a single AI-assisted transaction. Walmart made a similar announcement in October.

It's a move retailers say is focused on adapting to consumer's changing habits, though some are wary of the purported benefits. Deloitte's holiday survey found 33 percent of people plan to use generative AI in their shopping journey this year – more than double last year's share.

Edina-based Evereve uses Shopify for both its online and brick-and-mortar operations. The e-commerce platform is partnering with OpenAI to bring the retailer's women's clothing to ChatGPT, where shoppers will be able to make purchases directly through the chatbot.

"Someone can type, 'I'm looking for a dress to wear to a summer wedding in a tropical place in February. I'm this tall. I have an athletic build,'" said Tamer Selim, chief technology officer at Evereve. "The AI uses that information, as well as the data it has available, to try to find a match."

The chatbot can also draw from earlier conversations, such as a shopper's usual size or location, to refine results.

Most retailers already pull from vast troves of consumer data, including credit card transactions and social media activity, to improve recommendations on their apps. Those streams of information will now be combined with the habits of similar shoppers to predict what a consumer might want next – even if it's never crossed his or her mind.

That kind of targeting can help people find items that match their preferences. But it can also blur the line between helpful personalization and subtle manipulation, said Ali Makhdoumi, an associate professor at Duke University who studies data markets and privacy.

"Once you realize, 'Oh, this is not a good quality product, I don't want to use this,' they've already offered you something else," Makhdoumi said. "And they keep dragging you into this behavioral manipulation."

Smarter shelves and shifting prices

There are growing concerns about how AI will affect the white-collar workforce. Major companies, including Amazon, Target and Verizon, have cut thousands of corporate jobs while pointing to new AI investments.

Now analysts and consumers are asking similar questions about stores.

Inside stores, retailers are looking for ways to use AI for time-consuming tasks like changing price stickers. Walmart began installing electronic shelf labels last year, allowing prices to update within seconds.

That speed could also open the door to potential price gouging or dynamic pricing that shifts based on demand, supply and competitor moves, retail experts warn.

AI's rise has also sparked questions about its effect on in-store hiring. Some argue the technology frees employees to focus on customer service, while others worry it gives retailers an incentive to hire fewer workers.

"It's a labor-intensive thing when you're trying to update the prices across an entire store physically. That's an activity that would have taken multiple people, multiple days," Bagchi said. "And now, once it goes all electronic, it's just a matter of one person doing it in a matter of minutes or hours."

Job placement firm Challenger, Gray & Christmas projected the smallest seasonal hiring increase for retailers since the 2009 recession.

Both Walmart and Target have rolled out AI-infused apps for workers, which includes features like a chatbot that can answer common customer service questions, such as how to process a return without a receipt. Walmart's platform can also translate more than 40 languages in real time.

AI can also help store employees spot shelves that need restocking by flashing a light where an item is running low.

Despite the advancements, AI's impact on holiday shopping will be "relatively limited" this year because not every retailer offers useful tools and not every customer wants to use them, said Brad Jashinsky, a senior retail analyst at research firm Gartner.

But the technology is expected to continue reshaping retail operations.

"The more retailers that launch these tools, the better they get, and the more that consumers get comfortable and start to seek them out," Jashinsky said. "But customer behavior takes a long time to change."

Walmart's outgoing CEO Doug McMillon told the Associated Press in September that employees are enthusiastic when the tools eliminate extra steps. He said he expects most workers will be affected in some way by AI.

"I think no one knows how this is going to play out exactly," he told the AP. "The way it feels to me is that basically every job gets changed. And I think the best way to think about it is getting 'plussed up.' So how can I lean in the role that I have, regardless what that role is, to adopt new tools, leverage them and make things better than they would've otherwise been?"

Google plans to power a new data center with fossil fuels, yet release almost no emissions – here's how its carbon capture tech works

By RAMESH AGARWAL
Washington University in St. Louis (The Conversation)

THE CONVERSATION

As AI data centers spring up across the country, their energy demand and resulting greenhouse gas emissions are raising concerns. With servers and energy-intensive cooling systems constantly running, these buildings can use anywhere from a few megawatts of power for a small data center to more than 100 megawatts for a hyperscale data center. To put that in perspective, the average large natural gas power plant built in the U.S. generates less than 1,000 megawatts.

When the power for these data centers comes from fossil fuels, they can become major sources of climate-warming emissions in the atmosphere – unless the power plants capture their greenhouse gases first and then lock them away.

Google recently entered into a unique corporate power purchase agreement to support the construction of a natural gas power plant in Illinois designed to do exactly that through carbon capture and storage.

So how does carbon capture and storage, or CCS, work for a project like this?

I am an engineer who wrote a 2024 book about various types of carbon storage. Here's the short version of what you need to know.

How CCS works

When fossil fuels are burned to generate electricity, they release carbon dioxide, a powerful greenhouse gas that remains in the atmosphere for centuries. As these gases accumulate in the atmosphere, they act like a blanket, holding heat close to the Earth's surface. Too high of a concentration heats up the Earth too much, setting off climate changes, including worsening heat waves, rising sea levels and intensifying storms.

Carbon capture and storage involves capturing carbon dioxide from power plants, industrial processes or even directly from the air and then transporting it, often through pipelines, to sites where it can be safely injected underground for permanent storage.

The carbon dioxide might be transported as a supercritical gas – which is right at the phase change from liquid to gas and has the properties of both – or dissolved in a liquid. Once injected deep underground, the carbon dioxide can become permanently trapped in the geologic structure, dissolve in brine or become mineralized, turning it to rock.

The goal of carbon storage is to ensure that carbon dioxide can be kept out of the atmosphere for a long time.

Types of underground carbon storage

There are several options for storing carbon dioxide underground.

Depleted oil and natural gas reservoirs have plentiful storage space and the added benefit that most are already mapped and their limits understood. They already held hydrocarbons in place for millions of years.

Carbon dioxide can also be injected into working oil or gas reservoirs to push out more of those fossil fuels while leaving most of the carbon dioxide behind. This method, known as enhanced oil and gas recovery, is the most common one used by carbon capture and storage projects in the U.S. today, and one reason CCS draws complaints from environmental groups.

Volcanic basalt rock and carbonate formations are considered good candidates for safe and long-term geological storage because they contain calcium and magnesium ions that interact with carbon dioxide, turning it into minerals. Iceland pioneered this method using its bedrock of volcanic basalt for carbon storage. Basalt also covers most of the oceanic crust, and scientists have been exploring the potential for sub-seafloor storage reservoirs.

In the U.S., a fourth option likely has the most potential for industrial carbon dioxide storage – deep saline aquifers, which is what Google plans to use. These widely distributed aquifers are porous and permeable sediment formations consisting of sandstone, limestone or dolostone. They're filled with highly mineralized groundwater that cannot be used directly for drinking water but is very suitable for storing CO2.

Deep saline aquifers also have large storage capacities, ranging from about 1,000 to 20,000 gigatons. In comparison, the nation's total carbon emissions from fossil fuels in 2024 were about 4.9 gigatons.

As of fall 2025, 21 industrial facilities across the U.S. used carbon capture and storage, including industries producing natural gas, fertilizer and biofuels, according to the Global CCS Institute's 2025 report. Five of those use deep saline aquifers, and the rest involve enhanced oil or gas recovery. Eight more industrial carbon capture facilities were under construction.

Google's plan is unique because it involves a power purchase agreement that makes building the power plant with carbon capture and storage possible.

Google's deep saline aquifer storage plan

Google's 400-megawatt natural gas power plant, to be built with Broadwing Energy, is designed to capture about 90 percent of the plant's carbon dioxide emissions and pipe them underground for permanent storage in a deep saline aquifer in the nearby Mount Simon sandstone formation.

The Mount Simon sandstone formation is a huge saline aquifer that lies underneath most of Illinois, southwestern Indiana, southern Ohio and western Kentucky. It has a layer of highly porous and permeable sandstone that makes it an ideal candidate for carbon dioxide injection. To keep the carbon dioxide in a supercritical state, that layer needs to be at least half a mile (800 meters) deep.

A thick layer of Eau Claire shale sits above the Mount Simon formation, serving as the caprock that helps prevent stored carbon dioxide from escaping. Except for some small regions near the Mississippi River, Eau Claire shale is considerably thick – more than 300 feet (90 meters) – throughout most of the Illinois basin.

The estimated storage capacity of the Mount Simon formation ranges from 27 gigatons to 109 gigatons of carbon dioxide.

The Google project plans to use an existing injection well site that was part of the first large-scale carbon storage demonstration in the Mount Simon formation. Food producer Archer Daniels Midland began injecting carbon dioxide there from nearby corn processing plants in 2012.

Carbon capture and storage has had challenges as the technology developed over the years, including a pipeline rupture in 2020 that forced evacuations in Satartia, Mississippi, and caused several people to lose consciousness. After a recent leak deep underground at the Archer Daniels Midland site in Illinois, the Environmental Protection Agency in 2025 required the company to improve its monitoring. Stored carbon dioxide had migrated into an unapproved area, but no threat to water supplies was reported.

Why does CCS matter?

Data centers are expanding quickly, and utilities will have to build more power capacity to keep up. The artificial intelligence company OpenAI is urging the U.S. to build 100 gigawatts of new capacity every year – doubling its current rate.

Many energy experts, including the International Energy Agency, believe carbon capture and storage will be necessary to slow climate change and keep global temperatures from reaching dangerous levels as energy demand rises.

Ramesh Agarwal is a professor of engineering at Washington University in St. Louis.

TRAVEL

Early concept art of Disneyland's Fantasyland from 1954 from artist Bruce Bushman. The work is featured in a new exhibit at the Walt Disney Family Museum in San Francisco.

Collection of the Walt Disney Family Foundation / Disney / TNS

Think you know Disneyland history?

New exhibit unveils rarely seen concept art

By TODD MARTENS
Los Angeles Times (TNS)

Ric Miller / Walt Disney Family Museum / TNS

San Francisco's Walt Disney Family Museum is dedicated to preserving the history and legacy of Walt Disney, detailing his Midwest roots, animation achievements and development of Disneyland.

Walt Disney Co. likes to resurrect a famous Walt Disney quote saying that the empire was "started by a mouse." But when it comes to Disneyland, its theme park that become a SoCal institution, fans and history buffs crave specifics.

A new exhibit at San Francisco's Walt Disney Family Museum aims to chart the beginnings and early evolution of the Anaheim resort, and it begins with a trip Disney took with friend, animator and fellow train aficionado Ward Kimball to Chicago. The Midwest city, as many know, is Disney's birthplace, but in 1948 he and Kimball embarked on a vacation to that city's railroad fair.

At the festival, they enjoyed not only locomotives, but also an Abraham Lincoln impersonator, and expansive grounds that featured small re-creations of a frontier town and a Native American village, elements that would eventually make their way to Disneyland. And while in Chicago, the duo stopped at what is now the Griffin Museum of Science & Industry, home to a re-creation of a turn-of-the-century city street.

By the time the trip had concluded, Disney's vision of Disneyland had begun to take shape. Within days of returning to Los Angeles, Disney had written a memo capturing his ideas that would ultimately appear in Disneyland, including a train, a park and an assortment of vintage shops.

So perhaps it's more accurate to say that, with Disneyland, it all started with a holiday to Chicago.

The museum's exhibition, "The Happiest Place on Earth: The Disneyland Story," is based on a similarly titled book from animation producer Don Hahn and theme park designer-turned-historian Christopher Merritt. Consider the museum demonstration a sort of greatest hits companion to the coffeetable-type tomb, which is an indispensable look at Disneyland's history, a work that collects never-before-seen concept art and places a spotlight on many of the park's lesser-known designers.

The exhibit and book coincide with Disneyland's 70th anniversary. The former adds to and complements the museum's mission of preserving the legacy of Walt Disney, showing the park patriarch as something of a conductor who built Disneyland with the help of creatives across Hollywood.

Spread across two lower-level galleries, and also including a short film from Hahn, one that places a large emphasis on that Chicago tour, the exhibit, running through May, unfolds as a sort of a walk around the park. Portions are dedicated to Disneyland lands past and present – the exhibit includes the defunct "Indian Village," an aspect of Frontierland that flourished in the 1950s and 1960s – but rather than try to capture the park as a whole, the museum zeroes in on seldom displayed concept art from various Disneyland artisans.

The centerpiece of the primary gallery is a rarely resurrected penciled drawing of Fantasyland from Bruce Bushman, who created pre-opening concept art for the land inspired by Marvin Davis' master plans. You'll spy a small train coaster, a mini Ferris wheel and a circus area, complete with a large statue of a clown that would tower over guests. It's starkly different from both the land's Renaissance Faire-inspired beginnings and its European village look of today, but it's also emblematic of how Disneyland didn't emerge fully formed and was gradually iterated on prior to its July 1955 opening.

More Bushman art is shown elsewhere, in particular his drawing of Pirates of the Caribbean as a wax museum. In the mid-1950s, before it was decided the attraction would be a boat ride, it was envisioned as a walk-through experience complete with interior shops and a large battle scene. Hahn, who served as co-curator of the exhibit, in a tour of the museum's artifacts notes that Bushman was working on "The Mickey Mouse Club" around the time he was also devising plans for Disneyland.

"There's remnants of what the ride became," Hahn says, pointing to the map's depictions of tunnels and sandy areas with hidden loot. "There's battles, and you have to cross over a rickety bridge over a swamp probably with alligators. This drawing, in particular, is really special, to see the original white pencil drawing. Again, Bruce Bushman, here's a guy doing 'Mickey Mouse Club' sets, but also doing these profound things."

Earlier, the exhibition pays special attention to prominent Southern California landscape architect Ruth Shellhorn. She was hired just four months before the park opened but is credited as refining its pedestrian flow and crafting the gardens that eased transitions between Disneyland's central hub and its lands.

"We built the park as we went along," reads a Shellhorn quote used in the book and the exhibit and pulled from Shellhorn's archives at the UCLA Library. "I doubt if this procedure could have been followed successfully on any other project on Earth; but this was Disneyland, a sort of Fairyland, and Walt's belief that the impossible was a simple order of the day so instilled this spirit in everyone that they never stopped to think that it couldn't be done."

Costume designer Renié Conley, who worked on films such as "The Big Fisherman" and "Cleopatra," is also showcased. Her work for the front, Main Street areas of the park is shown, and it's Victorian, regal and just ever-so-slightly fanciful. A yellow and white dress, for instance, feels full of movement, fit equally for a tea party or a dance.

A key component of the book and exhibit, says Hahn, was a desire to focus on some of the important contributors to Disneyland who may not be household names to fans of the park. "Let's tell the human story of this," Hahn says. "All the crazy people who worked on this in an unbelievable short amount of time. That attracted me."

There's also artwork shown for abandoned concepts, such as a never-built Chinese restaurant with a robotic host that was envisioned for Main Street, as well as alternative visions for the introductory land. Some early designs for It's a Small World from beloved animator-turned-theme park desinger Marc Davis are in the exhibit. This is before it was decided to craft the ride in the look and tone of artist Mary Blair, and Davis' small concepts possess a more refined look – a cartoon London, for instance, rather than a children's playland.

Also rare: A small model of a vagabond's carriage from Rolly Crump, who worked on the Haunted Mansion, the Enchanted Tiki Room and It's a Small World, among other projects. Crump is responsible, for instance, for the whimsical facade of It's a Small World. The carriage, with mystical, fortune telling-inspired designs, was created for the never built Museum of the Weird, which would have nestled alongside the Haunted Mansion. Crump's son Chris says it may be one of the only surviving designs from that project.

Taken as a whole, the exhibit shows not just the beginnings of Disneyland, but how the park became an ever-evolving art project.

"It's important," says Hahn, when asked for this thoughts on why Disneyland has not only endured, but remains a pilgrimage for so many. Theme parks allow us to explore stories and fairy tales in a multidimensional space – an escape, yes, but also a reflection of the narratives that define a culture. And, adds Hahn, it's a source of rejuvenation. "It's not just kiddie stuff," he says. "It's important to our mental health."

For when you go to Dinseyland, says Hahn, "you're not thinking about your gas bill or your kid's education or how you can't afford to live paycheck to paycheck. It's not cheap. It's not a cheap day. But we still go because our hope is to get something there that we can't get in everyday life. To me, that's human regeneration, an ability to be inspired and get out of our head for a while."

TRAVEL TIPS

Vaccines, masks and more: What CDC recommends for holiday travelers

While it might be the most wonderful time of the year, it's also the biggest flu and cold season of the year, when cold weather brings gatherings indoors and germs flourish and spread.

That's why we contacted the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention to find out how you can stay as safe and healthy as possible on your next trip, from sitting in an airplane to mitigating the spread of illness if you do get sick.

Preparation is key

First off, it's important to plan for unexpected events as best you can when you travel – and that includes potentially getting sick.

The CDC recommends packing a travel health kit with important items you might need, like prescribed medications for longer than the duration of your trip, in case of unplanned delays, along with sunscreen, your health insurance card, and common items or medications that might be challenging to find in your destination.

Pro Tip: Accidents and illnesses can happen at any time, not just during flu season. It's important to purchase travel insurance that covers hospitalizations in case of unplanned emergencies, especially if you'll be heading abroad (where American health insurance doesn't cover medical expenses) or if you have any health conditions that increase risk. Be advised that if you have a pre-existing condition, to purchase travel insurance as soon as you book your trip.

Preventing illness

While it's likely you'll be interacting with people who are sick without you ever being aware of it, you can do the best you can at fighting illness by washing your hands and using hand sanitizer regularly.

"Wearing a mask is an additional prevention strategy that offers you an extra layer of protection from respiratory illness," said a CDC spokesperson.

Masks can be a helpful way to prevent the spread of respiratory illnesses, especially if you yourself are sick and still have to travel.

Pro Tip: Airplanes and buses are common public spaces that, while cleaned semi-regularly, don't often meet travelers' personal standards. If you're worried about getting sick while traveling, consider bringing a packet of alcohol wipes or other cleaning wipes to wipe down your seat, seatbelt and the rest of your personal space – at the very least, it'll keep you feeling comfortable while taking public transportation.

What happens if you get sick while traveling

Good news: if you get sick while traveling, you'll likely still be able to receive the medications or treatment you might need from a pharmacy or even a doctor's office or urgent care.

The CDC recommends wearing a mask in public spaces to reduce the risk of spreading your illness to others, sanitizing or washing your hands regularly and covering your mouth and nose with a tissue or your sleeve when you cough or sneeze.

Additionally, if you have a fever, the CDC recommends delaying travel. Take the time you need to rest and recover, and if you need to see a doctor, consider contacting your travel insurance to assist you.

Pro Tip: If you're traveling abroad in Europe (and elsewhere, I'm sure), head to the pharmacy first. There, you'll be able to tell the pharmacist about your symptoms, who will then give you several recommendations for treatment, such as common cold medicines. While the brand names might be different, it's likely they'll be the same treatment as you would receive in the United States, and it might help prevent more serious illness or a visit to the doctor.

A Note About Vaccines

The CDC's recommendations and information about vaccines have been irregular and uncertain lately, though the CDC spokesperson commented on vaccination as being a preventive for serious illness: "Be up-to-date on routine vaccines, such as measles-mumps-rubella (MMR), tetanus, and flu. If traveling internationally, other vaccines may be recommended or required.

"The decision to vaccinate is a personal one," said the spokesperson. "Parents should consult their health care providers on options for their families regarding vaccines."

It's highly recommended to trust your health care provider about the safety and efficacy of vaccinations; if you have questions about anything health-related, contact your doctor for more information.

By Lacey Pfalz / TravelPulse (TNS)